

April 25/May 8, 2011
Sunday of the Myrrh-bearers

Part I

Dear Christians,

These are a few thoughts which I wish to share with you.

Of late, certain clergy have written their thoughts concerning Mother Churches and jurisdictional matters. We hear expressions such as: "The Greek Church is our Mother Church since we received our episcopal ordinations from Greece." Others speak of the Russian Church as being their Mother Church, etc. . . . I, for one, always had the understanding that the Mother Church of every Orthodox Christian is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which we profess in the Creed daily.

Actually, the designation Greek Church, Russian Church, Serbian Church, etc., is a misnomer, and betrays a phyletic understanding of the Church. One can speak of the Orthodox Church in (of) Greece, or the Orthodox Church in (of) Russia, etc. . . .

When our Church incorporated, we incorporated under the name of The Holy Orthodox Church in North America (HOCNA), not the American Orthodox Church. Even the former Metropolia, when they proclaimed their autocephaly, incorporated under the name The Orthodox Church in America (O.C.A.). This is the correct understanding of Orthodox ecclesiology.

In Greece, for example, none of the local parishes are designated as Greek Orthodox Parish of . . ., but rather by the name of the Saint or Feast Day that the parish church is dedicated to. Actually, not even the name Orthodox is designated, since this is the faith of the nation and is understood without saying. They just say, "the Church of Saint George, Saint Nicholas, Saint Demetrios, the Ascension, the Annunciation," etc.

The phyletic designations came about mostly in the nineteenth century, when most of the Orthodox nations of the Balkans gained their independence from the Ottoman yoke and were designated by their ethnic makeup, calling themselves Greek, Serb, Bulgarian, Romanian, etc.

Historically, the first to use a phyletic designation was the Church of Rome, when they began calling themselves the Roman Catholic Church, instead of the Catholic Church of the West. They could not see the pitfall that this nationalistic designation would lead them to. Trying to hold on to the honor and pre-eminence which Rome had as the capital of the Roman Empire, they began designating themselves as the Roman Catholic Church.

The consequence of this was that Rome began to systematically stamp out all of the existing local rites, i.e., Celtic Rite, Gallican Rite, Mozarabic Rite, etc., and imposing the Latin Rite alone. In this phyletic pitfall of theirs, they went to the extreme of imposing the Latin language as the only language allowed in the Mass and services of the Church. And long after the Latin language ceased being spoken in Europe and even in Rome, they continued for centuries using only Latin, — which almost none of the faithful understood, — until recent times when they allowed the language of each nation to be used.

And now we come to the issue of Patriarchates and administrative centers in the Church.

In Apostolic times and post-Apostolic times, till the end of the pagan persecutions, each Church founded by an Apostle (of the 12 and of the 70), or by missionaries who were disciples of the Apostles, was the local Christian Church, complete and whole in that particular region, without any dependence on another church. There were no Patriarchates or local national churches administering the local churches. Most of the time, because of the fierce persecutions, the churches were in the catacombs and there was not much room for communications between them. This is evident by the Church in North Africa. It met during the persecutions in Carthage with numerous bishops present and issued canons and rulings on baptism and various other subjects. At the time there was no Patriarchate of Alexandria, therefore, Carthage and North Africa were not subject to the Church of Egypt. All problems were dealt with locally. There was correspondence and exchange of views, when it was possible, between Carthage, Rome and sees in Asia Minor, but there was no subordination of one to the other. Each was on its own.

With the coming of Saint Constantine and the freeing of the Church from persecutions, the local churches were able to breathe freely for the first time and to attend to organizing themselves into dioceses and administrative centers to better deal with dissensions and heresies.

Since the Roman Empire was administratively governed from four centers — Rome, New Rome, — which was founded by Saint Constantine and, after his repose, was named Constantinople, — Alexandria and Antioch — these four centers were proclaimed Patriarchates to have oversight of the churches. Thus we have the *Tetrachy* (“the Rule of the Four”) that had charge of the Church in the days of Saint Constantine. Rome supervised the West; New Rome the central part of the Empire, i.e., Asia Minor, Greece, the

Balkans; Alexandria, all of Egypt and Africa; Antioch all of Syria and the Middle East, including Palestine. Thus in the first centuries, Jerusalem was subject administratively to Antioch. Nonetheless, every bishop's diocese was autonomous concerning internal affairs.

The reason that these four sees were chosen over other churches as administrative centers was not because they were founded by Apostles, but because they were the centers of civil and political administration in the Empire. Thus, the administration of the Church was modeled on the administration of the civil authority. The four Patriarchates were not in any way more apostolic or holy than the other local churches, i.e., Jerusalem, Ephesus, Pergamos, Philadelphia, Athens, Thessalonica, Phillipi, Corinth, Patras, etc., etc., all founded by apostles. The four centers happened to be the four centers of the civil administration of the Empire and on this basis they were given eminence and position administratively over the other apostolic sees.

The Church always understood that both Old Rome and New Rome (Constantinople) were first and second in honor because of "τὸ βασιλεύειν τὸν πόλιν", they were co-capitals of the Empire and consequently the reigning centers and seats of the emperors.

Rome was not chosen to be the first in honor because it was founded by Saint Peter, according to the later Petrine teaching of the Latins. If the reason for Rome to be first among equals was theological and ecclesiastical, then Jerusalem should have had this position, since it was founded by Christ our Saviour Himself with His relative Saint James the Brother of God as its first bishop. It is a fact, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, that the first synod where the apostles gathered to resolve differences was held in Jerusalem and was presided over by its local bishop, Saint James, not by Saint Peter. If, according to the papal teaching, Saint Peter was instituted by our Saviour as His vicar upon the earth, then he should have presided at the first synod held in Jerusalem and not Saint James. It is evident that this erroneous Petrine doctrine was a later invention of the Papacy and not of apostolic origins. Actually, it was this synod that decided in favor of Saint Paul's teaching that the converts that came from the pagan nations did not have to first become Jews by receiving circumcision and, consequently, be obliged to keep the dietary laws and other prescriptions of the Jews, as Saint Peter held, but rather all — both Jews and pagans became Christians through holy baptism. So much for the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope, which was proclaimed dogma in the Roman Church at the close of the nineteenth century.

And since we have touched upon the subject matter of who founded the Church of Rome, it is not certain that it was founded by Saint Peter. The thing that is certain is that he was martyred in Rome, even as Saint Paul also. And this, because Rome was the capital; and so eminent apostles as Peter and Paul were martyred there, even as a little later Saint Ignatius of Antioch was brought in chains to Rome to be martyred there.

One thing is certain, that Saint Peter founded the Church of Antioch. And another thing that is certain is that Saint Paul wrote letters to the Romans, whereas we have no letter of Saint Peter to the Romans. Now it was a given in apostolic times that if one Apostle preached in a certain city, another apostle would not enter therein to preach, but would go elsewhere to preach.

The Latins recognize the fact that Saint Peter founded the church in Antioch and are sensitive on this point, that Antioch might also claim a right of preeminence on this basis, if the Petrine dogma holds. They, therefore, have instituted a feast day in their liturgical calendar wherein they celebrate the transfer of the Cathedra (seat, throne) of Saint Peter from Antioch to Rome, thus excluding Antioch from any claims of sharing the primacy.

If anything, the Church of Rome was founded by Saint Paul, and since both Peter and Paul were martyred there, they are celebrated as co-founders with the same feast day, although they were martyred separately on different days and years. Both Apostles are celebrated together in the Churches as Πρωτοκορυφαίοι (Foremost of the Apostles), and are referred to in the plural.

Then again, Rome later claimed that Saint Peter had rule over all the Apostles from the beginning and that the Church was founded on the person of Peter and the keys of the Kingdom were entrusted to him alone, and therefore he alone has the charge of all of the churches. The holy Church has always countered these heretical claims by pointing out that when our Lord said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock shall I build My Church," the "rock" refers to the confession which Peter had just made, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and that when the Apostles were ordained on the day of Pentecost, they were all ordained equally with the same descent of the Holy Spirit. Peter was not ordained with a separate ordination. And the keys of the Kingdom were given equally to all the Apostles when our Saviour breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained, and whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."

The relationship of our Saviour to each Apostle is direct and not through Peter. Saint Peter does not have the oversight of all the Apostles and churches. He is the Eldest of the choir of the Twelve and is respected as such, as first among equals, but he does not have the rule over them.

This is attested in the Gospels when we are told that after the Resurrection, our Saviour asked Peter three times if he loved Him more than the others (thereby healing the three denials and restoring him to discipleship again). After he was restored, it is written: "Then Peter turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following," . . . And he "saith to Jesus, Lord, and what of this man? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." If Peter had been commissioned by our Saviour to rule over all the disciples and to supervise them, he would not have been rebuked by our Saviour when Peter asked "what of this man" with the words "what is that to thee." Instead, he would have been complimented by our Saviour because he was exercising his "newly given" prerogative. Peter, by his three denials, had separated himself from the Saviour and was no longer a disciple. By being asked by our Saviour, not once, not twice, but three times, "Lovest thou Me," he was forgiven the three denials, and with our Saviour saying to him after this, "Follow thou Me," he again became a disciple. This was at the Sea of Tiberias where Peter had heard for the first time "follow thou Me," and straightway left the boat and nets and followed the Saviour. Now that he was called a second time and restored to discipleship, instead of rejoicing that our Saviour did not send him away, but rather called him again to discipleship, he immediately became curious concerning Saint John the Apostle. By His answer, our Saviour demonstrated that He has direct relationships with each and every Apostle, outside of Peter's jurisdiction ("What is that to thee?"). So also with each local church. Through each church's bishop there is a direct relationship with the "Great High Priest," the Lord Jesus. Each bishop is a living icon of Christ, the Great High Priest. The local churches are in communion with one another, but not subject to one another in their administration and pastoral care.

As I mentioned above, after the Church came out of the catacombs, the bishop of the capitals of the four centers that governed the Roman Empire were given the honorary title of Archbishop or Patriarch, not because these sees were founded by certain apostles, but because that is how the empire was governed. Every local parish, every local church, if it faithfully follows the apostolic faith and traditions, is equally "holy, Catholic, and apostolic". The Holy Liturgy celebrated by a Patriarch in one of the ancient sees and the

Holy Liturgy celebrated by a simple priest in a parish in Alaska or China or wherever is one and the same. It is the same Holy Eucharist. The Patriarchical liturgy may be celebrated with many concelebrants and more resplendently, but there is neither more or less grace in one or the other liturgies.

There are three orders of the priesthood — bishop, priest, deacon. If there are certain titles and designations among these three orders, i.e., Patriarchs, Metropolitans, Archbishops, Bishops, protopresbyters, archpriest, priest, archdeacons, protodeacons, deacons, these are all either functional or honorary. There is no less grace or more grace in any of these different designations. The ordination service for each order is the same. The titles are given afterwards. Every patriarch addresses his fellow bishops as “beloved brother and concelebrant,” and has jurisdiction in his own diocese; he is not given the right to meddle in another’s diocese.

So for the first five centuries, the Church had four administrative centers, i.e., Rome, New Rome (Constantinople), Alexandria and Antioch. Then in the sixth century, as an afterthought, it was decided at the Fourth Oecumenical Council that Jerusalem, where everything began, should not be subject to Antioch through the Metropolitan of Caesareia of Palestine (Palestine was under the civil administration of Antioch), but rather be elevated to be a Patriarchical Throne. In the hymnology of the Church, we always chant, “Rejoice, holy Sion, Mother of the Churches, the Dwelling-place of God.” It was only proper that Jerusalem would be elevated into a Patriarchate. Jerusalem is the only Patriarchate that has been designated as such for purely religious reasons and not because it was a capital city. We thus now had five Patriarchical Sees, and instead of a *Terarchy*, there was a *Pentarchy*.

With time, other capitals of local kingdoms (Tbilisi, Moscow, Bucharest, Belgrade, Sophia, etc.) also became Patriarchates. Note that in all instances it was not because some apostle had founded these sees (none had), but rather because they were the capitals of the respective countries, just as it was from the beginning in the fourth century when the first four Patriarchates were set up on the model of the civil administration (i.e., seat of government) and not for any theological or religious reason.

In the Greek-speaking world (Greece, Cyprus, Sinai), they chose not to call the primate Patriarch, but rather Archbishop, although he is always addressed as His Beatitude, like Patriarchs are addressed. In the nineteenth century, when Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Yoke, it

addressed its primate as Metropolitan of Athens. It is only in the beginning of the twentieth century that this was changed to Archbishop of Athens. Cyprus and Sinai also call their primates Archbishops.

The reason that the Greek-speaking world did not choose to name their primates Patriarch is in deference to Constantinople, which has the title Ecumenical Patriarch.

So now, with the many local national homelands, we have a plethora of Patriarchs. This is good, although the original *Terarchy* still have airs that they are superior to the new crop of Patriarchs. It is interesting that the Patriarchate of Antioch is no longer located in the ancient city of Antioch, but rather in Damascus, Syria, although they still use the title Patriarch of Antioch. The ancient glorious and populous city of Antioch was destroyed by a series of earthquakes and is presently a sleepy little town in Turkey, with ruins everywhere in the area of the great buildings that it once had. It seems that the days of the Patriarchate of Constantinople are numbered also, and it will have the same fate, since there are less than 1000 Christians left in the city of Istanbul.

Till the days of the present Pope of Rome, Benedict, one of the titles of the see of Rome was still Patriarchate of Rome [there are also Patriarchs of Venice, Milan, etc]. Only recently this title was dropped, sending a clear message to all that Rome is not one among others, but *singular*, above all others. As was stated above, Rome was the first to give in to the temptation of phyletism, identifying itself with the glory of the ancient Roman Empire, and literally taking on titles and practices that have nothing to do with the Christian religion and piety. The title "Pontifex Maximus" was a pagan priestly title of the Roman emperors. The ostrich fans are of Egyptian origin, adopted by the Roman Emperors, and continued by the Papacy, as also the *sedia*, which until recently was used to carry the pope into Saint Peter's cathedral on the shoulders of his court guards. The popes wore a triple-tiered tiara to designate that they had rule over the "city and the world" (*urbi et orbi*), both spiritual and mundane. For centuries, they claimed, through the forged Decretals (Constantinian Donations), that they had been appointed as sole, secular rulers over all of Europe by Saint Constantine the Great. It was only as late as the Renaissance that these documents were proven to be medieval forgeries. If I am not mistaken, it was Erasmus who demonstrated that the document with the signature and seal of Saint Constantine the Emperor was a forgery. Certain Latin words in the Donations were not in existence in the days of Saint Constantine. They came into being and were used as legal terms a few centuries afterwards. Wherefore, the

exact time of the forgery was pinpointed. The Roman Church uses such expressions as "Eternal Rome," although our Saviour teaches us that His Kingdom is not of this world, and Saint Paul teaches us that we have "no abiding city here below", but rather look forward to "that city not made by the hands of man," the heavenly New Jerusalem.

The Roman Catholics proclaim the Pope of Rome as the vicar of the Lord Jesus upon the earth. This prompted the renowned iconographer Photios Kontoglou to make the witty remark, "The Lord Jesus is present everywhere except in Rome. For there He has His vicar."

The Papacy, with its pagan Roman Empire titles and trappings, became a new idolatry. This all culminated in the teaching that no bishop was a true bishop if he did not receive the pallium from the Pope, and that no Christian was in the Church if he was not in communion with the Pope, acknowledging him as the sole ruler of the Church and infallible vicar of Christ on earth.

With all these innovations and other heresies, the Roman Patriarchate separated itself from the other four Patriarchates in 1054.

Now it is evident that the temptation that the Roman Papacy fell into, has become the pitfall of the New Rome, i.e., the Patriarchate of Constantinople. And we see this new papal mentality adopted more and more by the Patriarchs of Constantinople, and even some "traditional" Orthodox Christians.

The title "Ecumenical" Patriarch — which was first given by the Emperor in the sixth century to the Patriarch Saint John the Faster of Constantinople, and was protested by Pope Saint Gregory the Great, saying there could not be one bishop over all the bishops of the world — seems presently to have been taken literally by Constantinople, and it wishes to impose itself like a Pope in the Orthodox world. At the time, Constantinople answered Saint Gregory that the title "Ecumenical" was just honorary and really meant "imperial". At that time, he was known as Archbishop of Constantinople, and is still so titled, only with the addition of the title "Ecumenical Patriarch."

We hear of late that the Patriarch of Constantinople is the head of the Orthodox Church worldwide, and that if one is not in communion with the Church of Constantinople, he is not a member of the Church. When Demetrios became the Patriarch of Constantinople, he proclaimed on the day of his enthronement that, "I, the first of Orthodoxy greet our beloved brother, the Pope of Rome, the first of Christianity."

For some years now, from the end of the nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth century, we have heard rumblings of the preparation of a Great Council which is to be held in imitation of the Great Ecumenical Councils; not to combat a known heresy, as all the seven Ecumenical Councils were called to do, but rather to let in some "fresh air," as the Vatican II council did in the Roman fold. Constantinople and the other Patriarchates are threatening us Orthodox with a great anathema if we do not bow to their ungodliness. The purpose of this Great Council will be to proclaim and espouse the heresy of Ecumenism officially and to bring the Orthodox Church in step with the times, as far as the canons are concerned, for example, the fasts, to do away with some altogether and shorten and make "more humane" those that survive in a shortened form. Also, they intend to change the rulings of the marriage of the clergy, etc., etc., without end.

As a preparation for the calling of this Great Council, many preparatory Great Council gatherings have been called to agree on the agenda and the details thereof. Throughout the last century, beginning with the great heretic and arch-mason Meletios Metaxakis and the Patriarchs of Constantinople that followed, who also were innovators and masons, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has been maneuvering to present itself as having the sole right to grant autonomy and autocephaly to any new local churches, thereby sealing its new papal mentality and pre-eminence over all other fellow churches. The last such preparatory Great Council meeting took place just a few months ago at the center of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Geneva, where representatives of all the "Orthodox" Churches were present. Constantinople thought itself strong enough to be able to push through this new teaching that only itself has the right to proclaim new local churches. It proceeded to pass this as an agreed decision by all present. The representative of the Moscow Patriarch, Metropolitan Ilarion of Volokalamsk, strenuously protested and the meeting broke up with great disagreement. The prospect now of the invocation of the Great Council has been put off indefinitely.

But then again, the protests of the Moscow Patriarch are not purely theological, but rather because it has its own eye on the position of being a sort of Pope among the Orthodox, with its teaching of the "Third Rome", which has been around for a few hundreds of years.

Dear Christians, all the above has been written to demonstrate that each local Orthodox parish church is "one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic," complete in itself, with nothing less or more than any other local church. If a

local parish is not Orthodox in its faith, then it does not have a true Eucharist in its liturgy and the Orthodoxy of others is of no avail to it. The opposite is true also. If the local bishop is not Orthodox, then the Orthodoxy of the local parish is of no avail to him. Each church is a living organism. If the head is cut off, then the body dies. Then again, there cannot exist a head without a body.

Please read the book *Against False Union* by the late Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, published by the Saint Nectarios Press, Seattle, Washington.

I quote but a small portion of the section entitled "Ecclesiology":

They [the Ecumenists] understand the catholicity of the Church as a legal cohesion, as an interdependence regulated by some code. For them the Church is an organization with laws and regulations like the organizations of nations. Bishops, like civil servants, are distinguished as superiors and subordinates: patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops. For them, one diocese is not something complete, but a piece of a larger whole: the autocephalous church or the patriarchate. But the autocephalous church, also, feels the need to belong to a higher head. When external factors of politics, history, or geography prevent this, a vague feeling of weak unity and even separation circulates through the autocephalous churches.

Such a concept of the Church leads directly to the Papacy. If the catholicity of the Church has this kind of meaning, then Orthodoxy is worthy of tears, because up to now she has not been able to discipline herself under a Pope.

But this is not the truth of the matter. The catholic Church which we confess in the Symbol (Creed) of our Faith is not called catholic because it includes all the Christians of the earth, but because within her everyone of the faithful finds all the grace and gift of God. The meaning of catholicity has nothing to do with a universal organization the way the Papists and those who are influenced by the Papist mentality understand it.

Of course, the Church is intended for and extended to the whole world independent of lands, nations, races, and tongues; and it is not an error for one to name her

catholic because of this also. But just as humanity becomes an abstract idea, there is a danger of the same thing happening to the Church when we see her as an abstract, universal idea. In order for one to understand humanity well, it is enough for him to know only one man, since the nature of that man is common to all men of the world.

Similarly, in order to understand what the catholic Church of Christ is, it suffices to know well only one local church. And as among men, it is not submission to a hierarchy which unites them but their common nature, so the local churches are not united by the Pope and the Papal hierarchy but by their common nature.

A local Orthodox church regardless of her size or the number of the faithful is by herself alone, independently of all the others, catholic. And this is so because she lacks nothing of the grace and gift of God. All the local churches of the whole world together do not contain anything more in divine grace than that small church with few members.

Her relations with the other local churches are not relations of legal and jurisdictional interdependence, but relations of love and grace. One local church is united with all the other local Orthodox churches of the world by the bond of identity. Just as one is the Church of God, the other is the Church of God also, as well as all the others. They are not divided by boundaries of nations nor the political goals of the countries in which they live. They are not even divided by the fact that one might be ignorant of the other's existence. It is the same Body of Christ which is partaken of by the Greeks, the Negroes of Uganda, the Eskimos of Alaska, and the Russians of Siberia. The same Blood of Christ circulates in their veins. The Holy Spirit enlightens their minds and leads them to the knowledge of the same truth.

There exist, of course, relations of interdependence between the local churches, and there are canons which govern them. This interdependence, though, is not a relation of legal necessity, but a bond of respect and love

in complete freedom, the freedom of grace. And the canons are not laws of a code, but wise guides of centuries of experience.

The Church has no need of external bonds in order to be one. It is not a pope, or a patriarch, or an archbishop which unites the Church. The local church is something complete; it is not a piece of a larger whole.

(Against False Union, pp. 53-55)

The title Autonomous and Autocephalous are administrative and not of the essence of the Church. In the beginning, each church was autonomous. In the end times, there will not be a possibility of administrative cohesion, as in the times of the fierce persecutions of the Soviet terror. The last Christians will be isolated from one another. They will be in hiding and unknown to one another, yet nevertheless, they will be the last true Christians.

Pascha 2011

Forgive me and pray for me.

Your suppliant in the Lord,
+Priestmonk Panteleimon,
pilgrim