

# Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective

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## 1. The Eschatological Dimension

“Without eschatology,” Father John Meyendorff wrote, “traditionalism is turned only to the past: it is nothing but archeology, antiquarianism, conservatism, reaction, refusal of history, escapism.”<sup>1</sup> The eschatological dimension is a fundamental—but nearly forgotten—dimension of Christianity. Christianity is inconceivable without its eschatological outlook. Eschatology, however, is not simply the study of the end times, or the last chapter in the dogmatics textbooks. Eschatology is the basis and the foundation of Christianity; it permeates the whole body of theology. It is, according to Florovsky, “a ‘subtle knot’ within which all lines of theological thinking intersect and are inextricably woven together.”<sup>2</sup> It is, then, more of an attitude and a state of affairs that pertains to the eschaton’s breaking into the present, the foretaste “even now” of the life of the future age, and the active expectation of the coming kingdom.<sup>3</sup> The anticipated kingdom, however, “is not of this world” (John 18:36), does not use worldly means—such as force, violence, and authority—in order to come about and to survive (Matt. 26:53), cannot be reduced to the forms of the present age, and is not like anything that is known to us from the past. The kingdom of God comes to us from the future, from the renewed and transformed new world

of God—a world free from injustice, division, corruption and death. In the present phase, of course, we experience a foretaste of the life of the coming kingdom only “in part” and “in a mirror” (1 Cor. 13:12). The Church, however, has its gaze fixed on the vision of the eschaton, on the vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), a new humanity and a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), while it works and prays for the “union of all,” including humanity’s universal fellowship with God and each other.<sup>4</sup>

The Church is a type of the kingdom, “an image and figure of God,” as Saint Maximus the Confessor tells us.<sup>5</sup> Of course, since the resurrection and Pentecost, the mystery of the Holy Eucharist has provided a foretaste and glimmer of the coming kingdom, but the fullness of the new life will be revealed to us in the eschaton, at the end of history, when corruption and death are definitively abolished.<sup>6</sup> Christians, therefore, live in between these two pivotal points, finding themselves “betwixt and between” (ἀναμεταξύ), and this affects all their choices and values. Everything is judged on the basis of the eschaton; a Christian’s whole life is evaluated in light of the anticipated new world and oriented toward it.

The present takes its identity and hypostasis, its meaning and its purpose,

<sup>1</sup> John Meyendorff, “Does Christian Tradition Have a Future?,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 26 (1982): 141.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Florovsky, “The Last Things and the Last Events,” in *Creation and Redemption*, vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), 245.

from this new world.<sup>7</sup> Believers are the “aliens” and “exiles” in this world (1 Pet. 2:11). They refuse to be situated within the world or to be identified with the here and now because, even though they live in the world, they are not of the world (Phil. 3:20, Heb. 13:14). Without despising the world, they refuse to identify their life and mission with the forms and powers of the present age. Although they live within history, they refuse to be swallowed up by history. While Christianity is primarily historical, it nevertheless aspires to point toward another reality—the kingdom of God—that is meta-historical, but that has begun to influence and to illumine the historical present, just as the eschaton is continually, and paradoxically, breaking into history.

## 2. Christianity’s Unique Eschatological Anarchism

In the previous section, I tried to highlight Christians’ paradoxical position within the world: “In the world, but not of the world.” The preeminent Orthodox theologian of our time, Father Georges Florovsky, noted that Christians have their own polis, their own “order of life,” “another system of allegiance.”<sup>8</sup> From the beginning, Christianity was seen as a special community, a new kingdom, a holy nation, and a chosen people. According to Florovsky:

The early church was not just a voluntary association for “religious” purposes. It was rather the New Society, even the New Humanity, a *polis* or *politeuma*, the true City of God, in the process of construction. . . . The church was conceived as an independent and self-supporting social order, as a new social dimension, a peculiar *systema patridos*, as Origen put it. Early Christians felt

themselves, in the last resort, quite outside of the existing social order, simply because for them the church itself was an “order,” an extra-territorial “colony of Heaven” on earth. Nor was this attitude fully abandoned even later [in Byzantium] when the empire, as it were, came to terms with the church.<sup>9</sup>

A classic Christian text from the end of the second century, with strong eschatological overtones, seems to validate Florovsky’s analysis. It emphasizes even more strongly this sense of being a foreigner and Christians’ paradoxical position within the world. This, of course, does not leave much room for them to be concerned with questions of ethnic identity. We read:

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric life-style. . . . But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one’s lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live *in their own countries*, but only as *aliens*; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. *Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.* They marry like everyone else, and have children; but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food but not their wives. They are “in the flesh,” but they do not live “according to the flesh.” *They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.* They obey the established

<sup>3</sup> Georges Florovsky, “Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introductory Study,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 2 (1956): 27–40. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987). Jean D. Zizioulas, “Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique,” in *La Chrétienté en débat: Histoire, formes et problèmes actuels*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo et al. (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 91ff.

<sup>4</sup> From the Litany of Peace, *The Divine Liturgy of Our Father Among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, in *Patrologia Graeca* [hereafter PG] 91, col. 664, trans. in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. George C. Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 186.

<sup>6</sup> Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ: An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church*, trans. Robert Arida (Boston: The Wheel, 2018), 40–1.

laws; indeed in their private lives  
they transcend the laws.<sup>10</sup>

Christianity, then, has a unique eschatological anarchism—an eschatologically inspired estrangement from every kind of natural bond (such as language, customs, culture, marriage, family, homeland, ethnicity, and law)—because of the new life in Christ, which has already begun and is expected to be completed at the eschaton. In my opinion, this explains why Christian writers did not deal with questions of ethnicity and race until relatively recently. In fact, in the early Christian community and the corresponding biblical texts, which operated in the multi-ethnic environment of the Roman Empire, the issue of the relationship between a particular ethnicity and the Church was not even raised. This was because, first, the modern meaning of nation or ethnicity simply did not exist then, and second, as we know from 1 Peter 2:9, Christians understood themselves as a distinct nation, the new Israel, the new people of God, *the third race*, neither Jews nor Greeks. Christians “trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ,” in the words of the apologist Aristides.<sup>11</sup> “All believers in Christ are one people; all Christ’s people, although He is hailed from many regions, are one Church.”<sup>12</sup> As Florovsky notes: “There is, after Christ, but one ‘nation,’ the Christian nation, *genus Christianum* . . . i.e. precisely the Church, the only people of God, and no other national description can claim any further Scriptural warrant: national differences belong to the order of nature and are irrelevant in the order of grace.”<sup>13</sup>

This race of Christians is not based on racial or ethnic criteria, but on faith in Jesus Christ. It is not determined by differences according to birth in the

flesh, but by the unity that is granted by spiritual birth in Christ. Its mission is to embrace all humanity, all nations. The same awareness is expressed in the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of the Apostle Mark, when the celebrant prays: “O Lord, remember in Thy good mercy the Holy and only Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the whole world, and all Thy people, and all the sheep of this fold.”<sup>14</sup>

In this perspective, the Church is seen as a spiritual homeland, a spiritual genus, in which all the divisions of nature (race, language, culture, gender, social class) are overcome, and the mystery of unity in Christ and the fellowship of divided humanity unfold. The Church is a new people, a new nation, which is not identified with any other people, race, or earthly nation, since what characterizes it is not blood ties or subjection to the natural state of affairs, but voluntary personal response to the call of God and free participation in the body of Christ and the life of grace.<sup>15</sup>

Doesn’t all this necessitate the relativization of the concepts of nation and earthly homeland? And as legitimate as the nation and earthly homeland may be, can they serve as the core of the ecclesiastical *kerygma*, replacing and marginalizing the essential and primary elements of the Church, above all the eschatological dimension, which diminishes and relativizes otherwise legitimate patriotism—the interest in nations and homelands according to the flesh—precisely because eschatology establishes another measure of evaluation? After all, isn’t this the spirit of what Saint Gregory of Nazianzus maintained with such astonishing boldness and clarity?

My friend, every one that is of high mind has one Country, the Heav-

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London: SCM Press, 1962), xix–xxi. Savas Agourides, “The Hope of an Orthodox Christian: Present Promise and Future Fulfillment,” trans. Peter A. Chamberas, ed. Liadain Sherrard, *Synaxis: An Anthology of the Most Significant Orthodox Theology in Greece Appearing in the Journal Σύναξη from 1982 to 2002*, vol. 3 (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), 23–28.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Florovsky, “Christianity and Civilization,” *Christianity and Culture*, vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1974), 126.

<sup>9</sup> Georges Florovsky, “The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church,” in *Christianity and Culture*, 132.

<sup>10</sup> *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5:1–10, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot, J. R. Harmer, and M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 541. Emphasis added.



The city of God. Nineteenth-century ceiling mosaic at Aachen Cathedral, Germany.

enly Jerusalem, in which we store up our Citizenship. . . . And these earthly countries and families are the playthings of this our temporary life and scene. For our country is whatever each may have first occupied, either as tyrant, or in misfortune; and in this we are all alike strangers and pilgrims, however much we may play with names.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, in his work *To the Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian*, Saint Gregory gives voice to the Church's eschatological conscience, relativizing the earthly homeland as well as other worldly values, even going so far as to assure us that "there is one country for those of lofty character, the Jerusalem of the mind, not these earthly nations set apart in their little borders with their many changing inhabitants."<sup>17</sup>

### 3. From the Apostle Paul to Maximus the Confessor

This movement toward the overcoming of every natural division for the sake of, or because of, the new life in Christ—which began with the Resurrection—can be found as early as the works of the Apostle Paul. In Pauline

theology, the Church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–14, Rom. 12:4–5), where the eschatological realization of the mystery of unity takes place, and any differentiation or fragmentation of the unity in Christ is inconceivable. From the many relevant and well-known passages, I have chosen a characteristic one from the Letter to the Colossians, because we will find it recurring later, in the writings of both Gregory the Theologian and Maximus the Confessor. Paul writes that Christians "have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all." (Col. 3:10–11).

Even if, for the Apostle Paul, membership in a nation or a racial or linguistic community characterizes and attends our nature and our journey through history (Rom. 11:1, 2 Cor. 11:22), these characteristics are relativized and deemphasized in the light of faith and salvation (Rom 10:12–13). Thus, participation in the Church overcomes every kind of natural bond (such as blood, race, language,

<sup>11</sup> Aristides, *Apology* 15:1, in vol. 9 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Menzies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 276. See Georges Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert," in *Christianity and Culture*, 131; and Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, 83–7.

<sup>12</sup> Basil the Great, *Letter 161*, PG 32, col. 629, trans. in vol. 8 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [hereafter NPNF], series 2, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1885), 214.

<sup>13</sup> Georges Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, vol. 1 of the *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1972), 35.

<sup>14</sup> *The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark*, in vol. 7 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. C. Coxe (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 555

<sup>15</sup> See Georges Florovsky, "On the Veneration of Saints," *Creation and Redemption*, 201–202.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Against the Arians, and Concerning Himself* (Oration 33), PG 36, col. 229, trans. in NPNF 2.7, ed. H. Wace and P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1885), 332. See Athanasios N. Papatthasiou, "Introductory Remarks," *Σύναξις* 79 (2001): 4.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 24*, PG 35, col. 1188, trans. in *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations*, trans. Martha Vinson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Panegyric on His Brother St. Caesarius* (Oration 7), PG 35, col. 785, trans. in NPNF 2.7, 237.

<sup>19</sup> Panagiotis Nellas, introductory note to *Μυσταγωγία του Αγίου Μάξιμου του Ομολογητού*, trans. Ignatios Sakalis (Athens: Αποστολική Διακονία, 1973), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Maximus, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, col. 664–8, trans. in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 186–188.

and social class). The constitution of the Christian community is therefore above both ethnicity and class. Focus shifts from physical definitions to the charismatic, Eucharistic makeup of the body of Christ and to the realization of the eschatological mystery of unity as exemplified by common participation in the Eucharist, with all its attendant communal implications: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16–17).

We must not think, however, that this is the faith and the practice only of the early Christian communities. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, in his fourth-century *Panegyric on Caesarius*, repeats and extends the Pauline theology of unity and its eschatological realization in Christ's Resurrection, in which he says that there is no room for any kind of differentiation or distinction. He even goes so far as to characterize distinctions based on gender, nation, and social class as "badges of the flesh" that mar the image and likeness of God in man. Gregory observes:

This is the purpose of the great mystery for us. This is the purpose for us of God, Who for us was made man and became poor, to raise our flesh, and recover His image, and remodel man, that we might all be made one in Christ, who was perfectly made in all of us all that He Himself is, that we might no longer be male and female, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free (which are badges of the flesh), but might bear in ourselves only the stamp of God, by Whom

and for Whom we were made, and have so far received our form and model from Him, that we are recognized by it alone.<sup>18</sup>

A key text by Saint Maximus the Confessor moves in the same world of thought as that of Gregory of Nazianzus. Here, Maximus highlights the same elements and the same perspective as the Pauline theology of eschatological unity in Christ, echoing not only the thought, but sometimes even the phrasing of *The Epistle to Diognetus*, as well as the Letters of the Apostle Paul, as we previously noted. In the *Mystagogy*, an extensive commentary on the symbolism in the Divine Liturgy, Saint Maximus wants to show how "the Church and the Liturgy form the world's initiation into the realm of eternity."<sup>19</sup> In the first chapter Maximus formulates the position that the Church is an icon and type of God, because it carries out, in imitation of Him, the same unifying work. Just as God upholds and sustains all creation, so the Church builds unity. Let's look at the passage in a little more depth:

At the first level of contemplation *holy Church bears the imprint and image of God* since it has the same activity as he does by imitation and in figure. . . . It is in this way that the holy Church of God will be shown to be working for us the same effects as God, in the same way as the image reflects its archetype. For numerous and of almost infinite number are the men, women, and children *who are distinct from one another and vastly different by birth and appearance, by nationality and language, by customs and age, by opinions and skills, by manners and habits, by pursuits and studies, and still again by reputation, fortune, characteristics, and connections: All*

are born into the Church and through it are reborn and recreated in the Spirit. . . . In accordance with faith it gives to all a single, simple, whole, and indivisible condition which does not allow us to bring to mind the existence of the myriads of differences among them, even if they do exist, through the universal relationship and union of all things with it. It is through it that absolutely no one at all is in himself separated from the community since everyone converges with all the rest and joins together with them by the one, simple, and indivisible grace and power of faith. "For all," it is said, "had but one heart and one mind." Thus to be and to appear as one body formed of different members is really worthy of Christ himself, our true head, in whom says the divine Apostle, "there is neither male nor female, neither Jew nor Greek, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither foreigner nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman" . . . Thus, as has been said, the holy Church of God is an image of God because it realizes the same union of the faithful with God. As different as they are by language, places, and customs, they are made one by it through faith. God realizes this union among the natures of things without confusing them but in lessening and bringing together their distinction, as was shown, in a relationship and union with himself as cause, principle, and end.<sup>20</sup>

There are many things one could say after reading this exceptional passage. I will confine myself, however, to just a few observations—primarily those things which are not usually pointed out.

First, humanity's rebirth and re-creation in Christ, which happen "in the Spirit," necessarily involve the

overcoming of the various forms of division, among which the text explicitly mentions "nationality" and "language." Second, the authentic life of faith "does not allow us to bring to mind the existence of the myriads of differences" which characterize human existence—including those of nation and race—"even if they do exist." And yet we go on and on about them, and make them our banner and flag, thinking that these are the basic elements of faith! Obviously, "does not allow us to bring to mind the existence of the myriads of differences" is not some administrative or police order of prohibition; rather, it relates to the real life of Christian love, the overcoming in Christ of differences, and the realization, even now, of the eschatological mystery of unity.<sup>21</sup>

This ecclesial perspective on the relationship between Church and nation—no matter how often it has been forgotten or distorted—has not remained a dead letter in Orthodox tradition, but has survived in the prophetic voices of each era. One such prophetic voice, a witness in the twentieth century to the Church's conscience, was Saint Justin Popovich, who summarized in his own theological language the foregoing patristic tradition. He wrote the following, which is very significant for the topic at hand:

The Church is ecumenical, catholic, God-human, ageless, and it is therefore a blasphemy—an unpardonable blasphemy against Christ and against the Holy Ghost—to turn the Church into a national institution, to narrow her down to petty, transient, time-bound aspirations and ways of doing things. Her purpose is beyond nationality, ecumenical, all-embracing: to unite all men in Christ, all without exception to nation or race or social str-

<sup>21</sup> Further to the issue of ethnicity and race in the early Christian and Patristic tradition, see Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), and J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11–36, 229–251, 343–369.

<sup>22</sup> Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, trans. Asterios GeroStergios (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2005), 23–24.

<sup>23</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18:24, PG 33, col. 1044, trans. in *NPNF* 2.7, 140. John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 on First Corinthians*, PG 61, col. 13, trans. in *NPNF* 1.12, ed. P. Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Didache* 9:4, trans. in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 261.

<sup>25</sup> *Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuïs* 13:1, trans. in Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 118.

ta. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), because “Christ is all, and in all.” The means and methods of this all-human, God-human union of all in Christ have been provided by the Church, through the holy sacraments and in her God-human works (ascetic exertions, virtues). And so it is: in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist the ways of Christ and the means of uniting all people are composed and defined and integrated. Through this mystery, man is made organically one with Christ and with all the faithful.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. The Liturgy, the Eucharist, and the Mystery of Unity

The mystery of the Church is interwoven with the mystery of unity in Christ: “And it is rightly named *Ecclesia* because it calls forth and assembles together all men”; “for the Church’s name is not a name of separation, but of unity and concord.”<sup>23</sup> The mystery of unity in Christ—which cannot be understood without the overcoming of every form of fragmentation—is accomplished primarily in the holy Eucharist, the eschatological mystery *par excellence*, which is an icon of the Kingdom of God and a foretaste of the eschaton. The Eucharist is where the eschatological gathering of the scattered children and nations is realized proleptically (John 11:52, Matt. 8:11). In the earliest Christian communities there was a sense that the Eucharist was a gathering of those who were scattered, a union of those who were previously separated, and a participation in the supper of the kingdom. As the *Didache* notes, characteristically, in its chapter on the Eucharist: “Just as this broken bread was upon the mountains, and then was gathered to-

gether and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.”<sup>24</sup> The *Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis* repeats and extends the *Didache*: “And as this bread was scattered upon the mountains and having been gathered together became into one, so gather together your holy church out of every people and every land and every city and street and house, and make one living catholic church.”<sup>25</sup> The same view of the Eucharist—as an icon of the kingdom of God, as a realization and a manifestation of the eschatological mystery of unity, as an overcoming of every type of discrimination—continues to permeate the ecclesial conscience, in spite of rampant alienation, as we see in the *Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Church During Their Synaxis-Assembly at the Phanar at the Feast of the Nativity in 2000*:

When gathered in the Holy Eucharist, the Church realizes and reveals to the world and to history the incorporation of all in Christ, the transcendence of every discrimination and contrast, a communion of love wherein “there is neither male nor female, neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free” (Col. 3:11 and Gal. 3:28). In this way, it presents an image of the Kingdom of God, but at the same time also an image of ideal human society, and the foretaste of the victory of life over death, of incorruption over corruption, and love over hatred.<sup>26</sup>

In the Eucharist, then, which forms the Church into the Body of Christ, we experience, eschatologically, a foretaste of participation in the life of the Trinity, in the victory over corruption and death, and in the reali-

<sup>26</sup> *Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Church During Their Synaxis-Assembly at the Phanar* (2000), §5, [http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/patriarchate/documents/noel\\_2000GB.htm/](http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/patriarchate/documents/noel_2000GB.htm/).

<sup>27</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 39–82. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1971). Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1990), 89–100.

zation of the eschatological mystery of unity that overcomes every kind of division and separation (of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and so forth), since none of these will exist in the eschaton. This foretaste of the eschaton and its breaking into history through the holy Eucharist means that history is continually being sanctified and transformed, forever shedding the perishable in order to put on the beauty of the imperishable, always overcoming fragmentation in favor of unity, of humanity's universal fellowship with God and each other. Perfect unity and brotherhood—which characterizes the life of the future age—is given as a glimmer and a foretaste in the Eucharist and, because of this, the Eucharist is the Church's identity.<sup>27</sup> However, the life of the eschatological mystery of unity and the overcoming of all natural distinctions flows out from the Eucharist to the degree that we progress in the spiritual and sacramental life and attain "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12–13). It then permeates every facet of our lives, radically altering social relationships and deep-seated views about ethnicity and the chosen people, in order to continually remind us, among other things, of the example of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, which "had all things in common" (Acts 2:42–47), and which hosted the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–29).

Coming back to the present situation of the Orthodox Church, one could ask: Doesn't a nationalistic understanding of the Church push the eschaton away and dissipate the eschatological realization of unity? Doesn't it let ethnophyletism in through the back door—the same ethnophyletism that was condemned, with prophetic foresight, by the Synod of Constanti-

nople in 1872?<sup>28</sup> According to Amfilohije Radović (now Metropolitan of Montenegro), the role played by Ottoman domination in the emergence of religious nationalism remains a serious problem for researchers. This distinguished Serbian clergyman and theologian also connects the phenomenon of ethnophyletism with the resurgence of a particular "Jewish temptation," which consists in asserting the priority of physical realities and of the worship of ancestors and relatives according to the flesh, and in the overvaluation of the "religion of the ancestors" and the "national god" over and against the universal call to salvation and ecumenicity.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, don't all these things lead to confusion and a lack of theological criteria, to the world swallowing up the Church and co-opting it, as noted by Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas?

The Orthodox Church . . . particularly after the fall of Byzantium, was in danger of confusing the Church with the world. During this time, the bishops of the Orthodox Church undertook purely secular—and even some times political—roles, such as ethnarch and leader of the struggle for peoples' (national) liberation. The result is that today in countries such as Greece, the bishop is viewed as an official person, to such a degree even that as soon as the government does something which slights the clergy or takes away some of their secular authority, one can see an immediate reaction which betrays deep theological confusion. This example shows how important it is for Orthodoxy today to develop its own theological criteria, so that it can determine what is related to the structure of the Church as an eschatological community and what is related to

<sup>28</sup> On the 1872 condemnation of ethnophyletism, see Paraskevas Matalas, *Έθνος και Όρθοδοξία: Οί περιπέτειες μιιάς σχέσης. Από τó "Ελλαδικό" στο Βουλγαρικό Σχίσμα* (Herakleion: Πανεπιστημιακές Έκδόσεις Κρήτης, 2002); Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "Orthodox Ecumenicity and the Bulgarian Schism," SVTQ 57 (2013): 305–23; Metropolitan Maximos of Sardis, *Τó Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο εν τῇ Όρθοδόξω Έκκλησία* (Thessaloniki: Πατριαρχικόν Όργανο Πατερικών Μελετών, 1989); Alexander Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1977), 276–81.

<sup>29</sup> Amfilohije Radović, "Η καθολικότης της Όρθοδοξίας: Σομπορόνστ ή ό βυθος της άλογίας" in Μαρτυρία Όρθοδοξίας (Athens: Βιβλιοπωλείο της Έστίας, 1971), 36–8. Also see Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, "The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities," Greek Orthodox Theological Review 47 (2002): 357–79.



the Church as a community that belongs to the world.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Zizioulas, "Déplacement," 99. Also see Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1987, 98. Athina Kolia-Dermizaki, *Ὁ βυζαντινὸς "ἱερός πόλεμος": Ἡ ἐννοια καὶ ἡ προβολὴ τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ πολέμου στὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens: Στ. Βασιλόπουλος, 1991) traces the phenomenon of religious nationalism to the Byzantine period itself.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hopko, "Comments on J. Karmiris' Paper, 'Catholicity of the Church and Nationalism,'" in *Procès-verbaux du deuxième congrès de théologie orthodoxe à Athènes, 19-29 août 1976*, ed. Savas Agourides (Athens, 1978), 489.

<sup>32</sup> See Savas Agourides, *Χρόνος & Αἰωνιότης: Ἐσχατολογία καὶ Μυστικοπάθεια* (Thessaloniki: Πουρναράς, 1964), 3, 53; Petros Vassiliadis, "Τί ἐλπίζει ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀπὸ τῆ Θεολογία," *Ἐκκλησιαστικός Κήρυκας* 7 (1995): 201–8; Florovsky, "Eschatology in the Patristic Age"; Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, 51; Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," 36.

Specifically regarding the role and *raison d'être* of the bishop, who is the president of the Eucharistic gathering and the guarantor of the unity of the Church, I subscribe to the position of the distinguished Orthodox theologian, Father Thomas Hopko:

Can the bishop in the Church, who is the sacramental manifestation of Christ in the Church as the only Pastor, Teacher, Master and High Priest, be in any sense, according to Orthodox theology, a national leader, an "ethnarch"? . . . Does not the bishop in his hierarchical person have as his proper ministry to be the sign and guarantee in space and time of the continuity and identity of the Church, her unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity? Is the bishop not the one in the Church before whom, in a given time and place, the faithful people from all nations and nationalities are to present themselves in earthly imitation and actualization of the eschatological vision presented in the Book of Revelation when all the nations will gather before the throne of the Lord, the Logos and the Lamb, in final judgment and eternal adoration? And to be this in fact, does not the bishop of necessity have to be free from all purely national, ethnical and cultural involvements?<sup>31</sup>

## 5. The Church, the Nation, and the Eschaton

The final overcoming of the nation is the eschatological meta-historical event. We are not talking about the abolition of the nation, because then we would be talking about the abolition of history. But

since the eschaton has spilled out into history, and since we stand in the perspective of inaugurated eschatology, the call to overcome the nation is, therefore, placed already in the now.<sup>32</sup> If eschatology refers only to another life—life after death or life after the second coming—then the overcoming of the nation will also be meta-historical. But if the eschaton has already begun with the resurrection of Christ, then the overcoming of the nation in favor of unity in Christ has also begun to be realized already in the now, albeit partially.

The Church is hypostasized by the future, and draws its identity from the eschaton. The past is a moment, an episode in the many pages of the history of the Church, which includes many glorious moments, but also many failures and tragic disappointments. It is not, then, the past that determines the future, but the future, the eschaton, which judges the past. Therefore, on the subject of the relationship between nation and Church, the criteria cannot be the past and historical precedents, but rather the eschaton and its theology.

In any event, neither the partial proleptic realization of the eschatological mystery of unity nor the close connection between the nation and history can justify the nationalization of the Church that continues to take place either under the guise of "patriotism" or under the pretext of "resisting the homogenization of globalization." That the abolition or complete overcoming of nations is impossible within history does not legitimize our proclaiming the nation as a constituent and integral part of the ecclesial body and a "local manifestation of the mystery of the Church." Nor should we say that it contributes to the manifestation of "Orthodoxy as a real catholicity which concerns the total historical flesh of life," nor yet should we believe that the relationship between the Church

and the world, between Christianity and history, is manifested through the collectives of the nation and the people (to use the secular-political version of the term), as it is often claimed.<sup>33</sup>

These views essentially place the Church's pastoral affirmation of the nation on the same level with the prospect of eschatologically overcoming it. Indeed, according to this interpretation, the division into the various nations which constitute the human race is not considered a result of the fall, fragmentation, and arrogance of humanity. Rather it is "included within the plan of the divine economy for the salvation of the world from creation until the eschaton, at which time all the differentiations within the human race will be overcome."<sup>34</sup> This line of theological thought leads to the devaluation or even the outright substitution of the local character of the Church with a national character; this same spirit then guides the interpretation of the relevant canons.

The nation and its worship raise the danger of a new idolatry, inasmuch as they exalt false gods and create perishable realities in place of the only true God. The priority and universality of the Church are thus overturned and replaced by a national or national-religious ideology that always sets up for itself a mission of world order (such as "Greek Orthodoxy" or the worldwide mission of the Russian people). And this is exactly what the new idolatry consists of—the conscious or unconscious replacement

of the ecclesiastical with the national-patriotic: "Indeed, when national factors take over or the spiritual elements begin to disappear, there is then a regression to 'nationalism' in the ancient sense of the word, that is, to idolatry, because the faithful's fundamental characteristic is no longer unity in Christ, but rather national particularity or, worse, nationalistic opposition and rivalry."<sup>35</sup> The Church will urgently have to decide which it supports and professes: the unity of all and the universal brotherhood of man, or national particularity and personal isolation? The first, through incorporation into the Church and progress in the spiritual life, leads to freedom and the gradual overcoming or suppression of distinctions and separations based on nation, race, language, culture, origin, family ties, and so forth. The second returns us to a spiritual primitivism and provincialism, to the worship of the nation, which mires us in subjection to the earthly forces of land, race and blood. As Iakovos Mainas wrote: "'Land,' 'people,' and 'race' are primitive physical realities, and not manifestations of grace. They convey all the darkness and absurdity of the physical world, they belong to the world of shadows; wounded by sin, sunk in confusion and corruption, they wait for the time when they 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' [Rom. 8:21]. It is a tragic distortion of the truth that the Church's children wait for their liberation from these mortal elements while also looking to them as the source of their lives."<sup>36</sup> ✽

<sup>33</sup> Antonie Plămădeală, "Catholicité et ethnicité," in *Procès-verbaux du deuxième congrès*, 490–500. See also Christos Yannaras, "Αντίσταση στη 'μεταφυσική' του δικεφάλου," *Καθημερινή*, October 28: 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandreou) of Switzerland, "Εκκλησία και ἐθνότητα," *Επίσκεψις* 484 (October 31, 1992): 24–5; and "Ἡ ἐνότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἡ πολλαπλότητα τῶν ἐθνῶν," *Επίσκεψις* 442 (July 1, 1990): 8–9.

<sup>35</sup> George Mantzaridis, *Ὁρθόδοξη θεολογία καὶ κοινωνικὴ ζωὴ* (Thessaloniki: Πουρναράς, 1996). See also Kalaitzidis, "The Temptation of Judas," 364ff.

<sup>36</sup> Iakovos Mainas, "Τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο φρόνημα," in *Μαρτυρία Ὁρθοδοξίας*, 77.



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