
Ethnic Particularities and the Universality of Orthodox Christianity Today

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THE TITLE OF MY PAPER INVITES US TO PONDER THE PROBLEM of the relationship between the catholicity of Orthodoxy and the parochialism of the Orthodox; the universality of the message with the ethnic peculiarities of the messengers. I will address two questions: First, do ethnic particularities stand in the way of proclaiming the universal truths of Orthodoxy? Second, what kind of teachings would commend Orthodox Christianity as a universal religion? I will try to answer the first question in terms of biblical evidence and historical realities. And I will answer the second question in personal terms — what appeals and keeps me in the fold of Greek Orthodox Christianity.

A

The term ethnic designates the ethos, the character, and distinguishing characteristics of a division of humankind's population marked by a common language, history, customs, manners, racial characteristics, and especially historical consciousness. In the last analysis ethnic is almost synonymous to culture. Culture, from *cultus*, cult, to till, cultivate is what people have cultivated on their native soil—language, ideas, skills, arts, customs. But is Christianity antithetical to culture and ethnic particularities? Is Christianity above or apart of human culture? Did Christ intend to achieve the unity of humankind by eliminating cultural, linguistic, and psychological differences? As a historical human being was Jesus the Christ less ethnic than some of us? Consider this love for his homeland and the country side of Palestine, his deep compassion for the fate of Jerusalem, his concern for his own compatriots and his attitude toward non-Jews whom, at one time, he even called dogs (Mt 10.15. 24-26, 23.37-38. LK 21.20-24; 23.28-31). Jesus of Nazareth was fully identified with the ethnic particularities of ancient Israel. He grew up in obedience to the pre-

scriptions of the law and the customs of his times. While he repudiated some, he transformed and gave new meaning to others. He honored the Sabbath but he made it clear that the Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath. He emphasized that He came to fulfill, not to destroy the law. He proved himself neither above nor against but a transformer of culture. To deny the ethnic or cultural concerns of Christ is to deny His human nature. The unity he sought to achieve was not a unity through uniformity by destroying all ethnic, cultural, racial, and national characteristics. He did not command his disciples to go out and destroy but to evangelise the *ethne* (nations).

Was Saint Paul less ethnic than some modern Christians? When the authenticity and purity of his ancestry was called to question (Rom 9.1-3, 11.1; Gal 1.13-14, Phil 3.4-6), Saint Paul was prompt to make it clear that he had not repudiated his ethnic identity, including his native tongue. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I" (2 Cor 11.22), he responded to his critics. And elsewhere he emphasized that he was one of the people of Israel, or of the tribe of Benjamin, "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil 3.5). He called himself "a Jew by birth" (Gal 2.15). The Israelites were his "brethren, . . . kinsmen by race" (Rom 9.3). Saint Paul did not renounce his Hebrew ethnic background and his inherited privileges. He rejected some ethnic and cultural traditions of old Israel but in the name of Christ or the Holy Spirit he introduced new ones.

When Saint Paul wrote that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek," he did not intend to destroy the Jewishness of the Jews nor the Greekness of the Greeks. His concern was to make people of all nations into believers of Christ. Greeks and other Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to become Christians. The Christian Jews and the Christian Greeks did not blend into a new race but their unity was achieved in their Christianity.

Saint Paul wrote it was Christ who made both Jew and Greek into one, and broke down the middle wall of the barrier between them, but he did not indicate that a supernational humanity was bound to emerge because the dividing structure had been removed. He meant that the removal of the fence would enable Jew and Greek to join hands and become friends, if not brothers. At no time did Christianity eliminate ethnic and cultural characteristics and particularities, even when coercion for assimilation, oppression, and colonization were exercised by emperors or missionaries.

Those early Christians who denounced culture as incompatible with the Christian faith, such as Tatian and Tertullian were condemned as heretics. And those who withdrew from society into a community of

their own, such as various monks trying to disassociate themselves from or reduce their contact with culture, ultimately formulated their own culture not necessarily in agreement with the teachings of their scriptures. As individuals some fled to monasteries as protesters against the wealth and power of the established order but soon after they themselves emerged collectively very powerful and wealthy. And those who considered ancient Greek culture as a mass of evil remained peripheral to Christian thought and movement.

Christianity itself began not only as the "fulfilment of time" and messianic expectations, but also as a protest movement against established traditional, legalistic, and ritualistic Judaism; as a rejection of the view of reality taken for granted by the Greco-Roman establishment whether religious, social, or political in nature; as a protest with alternate options which emphasized egalitarianism, the experience of philanthropy, and acceptance within the community; as a protest against the evils of this world, pursuing their activities with an eschatological orientation and separation from this world; as a protest against the establishment as a whole, with an appeal for a total commitment to the new organization. Though it began as a community of protest within the framework of Hellenized Judaism, in a few years Christianity provided its own self-definition shaped under the influence of a variety of cultures, establishing its own cultural forms. History confirms that the collaboration of any religion and culture has been the normal way in humankind's experience. In the case of Christianity ethnic particularities and culture become idolatrous only when they identify themselves with the divine order and try to replace the Divinity itself. On the other hand any religious movement which adopts a negative and consistently critical attitude toward culture becomes a force of disintegration and ultimately is destined to emerge with its own culture. Christianity's own history confirms this. The romanticism of the Reformation Movement in the sixteenth century resulted in the breakdown of Western Christianity into more than 300 denominations, churches, and sects.

Whether for religious differences, linguistic misunderstandings, or national aspirations early Christianity never achieved a unity. In fact one of the conditions prevailing in the early centuries of the Christian Church, which appalled non-Christians, was disunion. Tenacious cultural survivals, intellectual tensions, ethnic aspirations had contributed to the existence of scores of doctrinal positions. By the year 392, when Christianity became the official-state religion of the Roman Empire, there were more than one hundred Christian divisions.¹

¹ Theodoretos, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.29. See also my article "Toward the Convocation of the Second Ecumenical Synod," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 27, 396-98.

Epiphanius of Cyprus writes of 60 Christian heresies; Philastrius of Brixia mentions 128 sects and religious creeds, and a few years later Augustine wrote of 87. Evidence indicates that as late as the eighth century there were more than 70 religious sects in Christian Byzantium most of which claimed to be Christian. Today there are more than 300 churches, denominations, sects—all in the name of Christ.

While we cannot but take seriously the theological issues, the intellectual background, and the religious debates in the early Church which lent to sectarianism, we cannot ignore the seriousness of the social, political, geographical, and ethnic differences that contributed and continue to foster the birth of heretical movements and ecclesial schisms. Did Church Fathers denounce ethnic particularities in order to eliminate divisions? Did they renounce their cultural heritage in order to achieve Church union? Let us turn to the attitude of a few major and influential Church Fathers.

In the middle of the fourth century (362-63) Emperor Julian issued laws forbidding Christian teachers to teach Greek literature and the Greek classics. "Because you have given yourselves to the spirit of apostasy, you don't deserve to study and teach the ancient Greeks," Julian said. Christian convictions were contrary to the teachings of the masters they taught. Julian writes: "When a man thinks one thing and teaches his pupil another, in my opinion he fails to educate exactly in proportion as he fails to be an honest man . . . If the reading of your own scriptures is sufficient for you why do you partake of the learning of the Hellenes?" he asked.²

Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, both Patriarchs of Constantinople, responded to Julian's anti-Christian polemics and policies but they did not denounce their cultural heritage. Their refutations of Julian's views were intended primarily to emphasize the superiority of the Christian religion over paganism. They offered Christian apologies and defences but not cultural or ethnic denunciations. Gregory criticized imperial policies because they would undermine the stability of the Empire. Gregory stressed that Julian's attempt to restore paganism endangered the political and cultural life of the Empire.³ "Who gave you the right to deprive us of speaking and teaching Greek (to *hellenizein*) and who told you that Greek is your own patrimony and not ours as well?"⁴ Gregory asked. Gregory clearly implies that even though Christians reject pagan religious beliefs and practices,

² Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 229c; idem, *Epistles*, no. 36.

³ Gregory the Theologian, *Logos Kata Ioulianou*, 1:74.

⁴ Ibid. 1-101-105.

they do not reject their cultural inheritance. In both essays against Julian, Gregory appears totally versed in Greek literary and philosophical heritage, including mythology. He uses many classical rhetorical devices to compare the accomplishments of Christians with those of pagans.

In the essay the *Blessed Babylas* and *Against the Pagans* (Hellenes) John Chrysostom, too, condemns pagan religion but not the Greek cultural inheritance. In fact, his main purpose is to demonstrate that ancient Greek ethical theories and teachings and Greek ideals of virtue were realized among Christians. "Chrysostom is faithful to traditional Greek ethical theory" in the words of one of Chrysostom's special students.⁵ He constructed his essay in the best rules of Greek classical learning.

That Christianity was not perceived as transcending of culture was also indicated by Basil of Caesarea. "The fruit of the soul is preeminently truth, yet to clothe it with external wisdom is not without merit, giving a kind of foliage and covering for the fruit and an aspect by no means ugly" Basil writes in his exhortation to young people.⁶ As early as the first century much of what became distinctive in Christianity, in faith, worship, and daily practice was the result of Christianity's dialogue with the culture in which it emerged. This dialogue has been present in every Christianized nation and inherent in the relationship not only between Christians of different creeds but also among Christians who share a common faith, prayer life, and ethical norms, such as the Orthodox.

In the Latin Christian West, the attitude of Pope Gregory the Great toward local cultures and ethnic particularities is very instructive. Gregory had dispatched a mission of former fellow monks to bring the Gospel to England. The mission was headed by Augustine whose capacity for organization was limited. He referred all the problems he encountered there to the Pope. Gregory instructed Augustine not to try to destroy all the pagan customs of the English, but rather to adopt and only transform what is dear and traditional to the people. Thus pagan shrines were consecrated and became Christian churches. Old marriage customs were not to be changed before people achieved sufficient understanding. Midwinter pagan festivals were adopted and Christianized.⁷

Scholars have pointed out that "one of the things pagans resented

⁵ Margaret A. Schatkin, "Discourse on Blessed Babylas and Against the Greeks" in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 73 (Washington, D. C., 1985), p. 42.

⁶ Basil of Caesarea, *Exhortation to Young People*, ch.2, ed. B. Pseutogas, *Basileiou Kaisareias Apanta to Erga*, vol. 7 (Thessalonike, 1973), p. 322.

⁷ Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, 3.16.

most was that Christian thinkers had adopted Greek ideas and methods of thinking to expound Christian teaching. Porthyry said Origen 'played the Greek' and Celsus complained that Christians had adopted the technique of allegory, an achievement of Greek reason, to interpret the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures."⁸ Greek philosophy sharpened Christian doctrine; Greek religious ritual enriched Christian worship; Greek cultural forms infiltrated Christian customs; religious cults influenced and permeated every aspect of private life. Formative Christianity did not destroy Greco-Roman culture but adopted and consecrated it, transforming it into what authoritative scholars call Christian Hellenism.⁹

History reveals that often religious beliefs and practices correspond to ethnic and cultural inheritances. In schisms cultural historians see more ethnic national aspirations than doctrinal disagreements. Whether Syrians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Armenians, and other ethnic minorities of the Near East separated from the mainstream orthodox catholic church for doctrinal reasons, linguistic misunderstandings, or nationalistic aspirations is a controversial subject. While theologians and ecclesiastical historians tend to underline doctrinal differences, cultural, political, and social historians prefer to stress other forces. In any case the creation of heresies and schisms, antagonisms, and conflicts is just as complex as the human being itself.¹⁰

Relations between the Latin speaking West and the Greek speaking East during the ninth and tenth centuries; conflicts between Latin Papal Rome and Lutheran Germany; Rome and England in the sixteenth; twentieth century Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland; Iraqis and Iranians in modern times reveal that ethnic interests supercede religious considerations. Recent events around the globe indicate that the sense of national identity, devotion to native culture is as strong, if not stronger, than religious faith—whether by the shores of the Baltic sea, in the Caucasus, Byelorussia, Ukraine or other countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is well known that a common religion in the countries south of the Rio Grande has not

⁸ Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London, 1984), p. 201.

⁹ Frances Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1966), pp. 611-58; Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, tr. by Robert L. Nichols in vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, Mass., 1979), pp. 4-26; cf. Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 81-122.

¹⁰ For a discussion on whether heresies and schisms were disguised ethnic and social movements see A. H. M. Jones, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, vol. X, part 2 (1959), pp. 280-97.

prevented them from hating each other. The potency of tradition, long-standing customs and deep-seated religious inheritances are intricately linked with nationality and ethnic aspirations.

Are Anglicans, whether of England, Australia, Canada, or the United States less ethnic-minded than Albanians, Bulgarians, Poles, Romanians, Greeks, Russians, Serbians, Ukrainians? Are those who advocate the so-called Americanization less ethnic? What some people call ethnic, others consider "the normal way," and what is "normal" for some is "abnormal" for others. It is the need for national independence and boundaries, for ethnic identity rather than religious unity that Eastern Europe, parts of Asia and Africa are today in turmoil.

Who is responsible for this seemingly anomaly; human perception of Divine Revelation? It was in the name of God that the boundaries (*horia*) of the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Chananeans, the Israelites, and numerous other ancient tribes and people were defined. The term *horia*, as ethnic boundaries, occurs more than two hundred times in the Old Testament. Where do you draw the line between human self-perception and God's revelation? Numerous crimes have been committed in the name of God's revealed truth, whether in the name of God's revealed truth, whether in ancient Israel, in the Christian Church (for example, in the Age of the Crusades), in the Islamic religion, and elsewhere.

The situation with the family of Orthodox churches has never been different. National interests, desire for ethnic identity, and national aspirations have contributed to several military conflicts among the Orthodox.¹¹

While ethnic particularities have been accepted as natural, phyletism (racism) has been condemned by the universal Orthodox Church as immoral. Religious unity does not depend on ethnic uniformity or administrative conformity. Unity in diversity rather than unity in uniformity has been the guiding principle of the Orthodox in the old world as well as in the new until the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Administrative unity of all Orthodox churches in America is the ideal which I wholeheartedly support. But how do we realize it? It was perceived as a most desirable thing as early as the turning of the century. The Russian Archbishop Tikhon in his effort to explain trends in the Orthodox churches in America wrote about the role nationalistic, ethnic, linguistic, and social factors play in the life of every church. He writes:

The North American diocese is composed not only of different

¹¹ Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, 1960), pp. 111-17.

nationalities, but also of different Orthodox churches, which though one in faith, each has its peculiarities in the canonical order, the office ritual, and the parish life. These peculiarities are dear to them and altogether tolerable from the general Orthodox point of view. This is why we do not consider that we have the right to interfere with the national character of the churches in this country; and on the contrary, try to preserve it, giving each a chance to be governed directly by chiefs of the same nationality.¹²

What has happened in the course of seventy-five years since Archbishop Tikhon wrote the above? Little has changed. Several years ago the Orthodox Theological Society in America devoted its annual meeting to the study of a very similar issue, the problem of the *diaspora*, and I refer you to the papers and responses of that Conference for study and reflection.

In addition to the reasons cited by Archbishop Tikhon, the name of the Church has become an issue of contention. One name or many? American as a national unifying name, or names of autocephalous churches? Of course, we all know that the ecclesiology of the autocephalous and the local church converge in their sacramental nature. Each autocephalous church is a constituent part of the ecumenical church in a sacramental sense. As an integral part of the catholic orthodox church, the local church is a microcosm of the universal.

Historically speaking, for many centuries, all Orthodox, including those in the America, called themselves Greek Orthodox. For more than a millenium since the conversion of the Slavs, Bulgarians, and Russians to Orthodox Christianity, there were no national or ethnic names for the Church. The Patriarchates of Trnovo, recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1235 as autocephalous; the archbishoprics of Ohrida (Ohrid) and Pec (Ipek) founded in the thirteenth century, the Russian church and other Orthodox—all used the term Greek to designate the nature of their churches. Thus the Russian Patriarch Nikon had no problem in identifying himself as Greek Orthodox. "I am a Russian . . . but my faith and religion are Greek" he writes.¹³ National or ethnic names such as Albanian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Hellenic, Rumanian, Russian, and Serbian were introduced in the nineteenth century and later.

Long before the nineteenth century in the days of the Renaissance

¹²John Matusiak and Alexander Doumouras, "A Survey of Non-Russian Orthodox Groups in America from 1898-1917," in *Orthodox America 1794-1976*, ed. Constance J. Tarasar and John H. Erickson (Syosset, N. Y., 1975), p. 143.

¹³Cited by W. Palmer, *The Patriarch and the Tsar* (London, 1873), 2, p. 175; A. A. Vasiliev, "Was Old Russia a Vassal State of Byzantium?" *Speculum*, 7 (1932) 350.

and especially in the age of the Enlightenment, the old concept of the church as the sole ruler of a society was challenged. European nations began adopting nationalism and secularism as their ideology creating a new political and cultural identity based not on a universal faith but on the particularism and localism of language, custom, tradition, and heritage. Few are the people today who would exchange their national or ethnic identity for a religious identity. For many people religion has lost its deeper spiritual character and has become a cultural ingredient of nationality, a mere cultural dimension of national identity.

Who is responsible for this nationalistic approach to the ethnic names of the Church? All Orthodox jurisdictions. But let me remind you that the term Greek has a much better claim to Christianity and to Orthodoxy in particular than any other name. Yet some Orthodox Christians, hierarchs and lay theologians alike, systematically try to eliminate the term Greek as nationalistic rather than as a historical and cultural necessity.

I maintain that the epithet Greek is becoming to every Orthodox, independently of national background. For several decades it was common in the United States to designate ethnic churches as Hellenic Greek Orthodox, Ukrainian Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic, etc. For historical and cultural reasons I maintain that Greek Orthodox is more descriptive of the nature of Christian Orthodoxy than simply Orthodox. Leading scholars remind us that the early church "was implanted by the Greeks and expressed itself in the Greek language," that the Western or "Latin Church originated from the Greek Church as a branch grows from a tree trunk."¹⁴ Parenthetically let me add that in the Greek American Community we discern a phenomenon parallel to what existed in the Greek world of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. There were two trends within the Greek speaking Orthodox. Those who traced their roots in Asia Minor, Constantinople, Thrace and the newly liberated islands preferred to see themselves as mere Christians rather than Greeks, an inheritance shaped under Ottoman rule. In the Ottoman Empire the *Romioi-Rum* were simply Orthodox Christians. This party was supported by the higher clergy, the lay dignitaries of the Patriarchate, wealthy merchants, Phanariot aristocrats, and functionaries in the Ottoman administration.

The second party whose origin can be traced back to the later centuries of Byzantium consisted of those who appreciated the ancient Greek heritage and observed more historical continuity between ancient and Christian Hellenism. In the nineteenth century in particular, but also as late as our own times, the protagonists of this party advocated

¹⁴Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, 1986), p. 351.

Hellenism and the liberation of all Greeks from Ottoman Turkish yoke. The medical, legal, literary and teaching professions were the leaders of this movement. However, there is evidence that often both had a common objective and both worked more or less to instill a sense of Greek historical consciousness to the Greek people under Turkish rule. While one stressed the priority of religion the other emphasized the cultural. These two trends are present today in many of our Communities in the diaspora including the United States and Canada. But there is no need to side with either extreme. Religion and culture co-exist and their activities can be harmonized. Religion is for the human being, who lives in time and space, who is more than a spirit, and whose needs include principles and elements of culture. Religion divorced from culture becomes an abstraction and cannot survive in a vacuum. But culture without religion becomes blind, unfulfilling, secular. In the conflict between the expectations of religion and the needs of culture one must be in a position to prioritize.

History confirms the reality of a proverb common among the native Americans who say:

"Don't try to preserve your culture let your culture preserve you instead"

or to recast it:

"Don't worry if you cannot preserve your culture for it can be preserved by itself; worry if your culture cannot preserve you."

Speaking of the Hellenic Greek Orthodox faithful, I should stress that their perception of national and cultural identity is inextricably tied to the historical origin of the Greek people as a whole—not only of the modern Greek state. Whether in non-Christian antiquity or the Christian era, Greeks lived in several geographical areas—in Asia Minor and the Near East, in the Greek Chersonese proper but also throughout the Balkan peninsula, in Italy's Magna Graecia, but also Western Europe. It is totally anachronistic and historically, anthropologically, linguistically, and culturally inaccurate to invoke centuries of foreign invasions and even occupation of Greek lands to presume the disappearance or total adulteration of the Greeks as a nation in order to tell them that they should not claim any affiliation with the Greek people in history. Whether in the open or behind their back, the Greeks are told that they should abandon their historical consciousness and ethnic perception. All arguments however, whether of Austrian, English, Slavic, or ultra-Orthodox origin to make the modern Greeks

to alter their history are divisive, meaningless, and futile. This does not mean that some Greeks are less guilty for an identification of Greek Orthodoxy with nationalism. Nevertheless the term Greek Orthodox refers to all Orthodox, independently of national background. For historical and cultural reasons Greek Orthodox is more descriptive of the nature of Christian Orthodoxy than simply Orthodox.

B

The second part of my paper is a discussion of the universality of Orthodoxy in view of many ethnic particularities. What elements and principles of its system of faith, ethics, and worship can commend Orthodoxy universally? Before we proceed to identify some of Orthodoxy's universal principles which give me a profound satisfaction, we have to raise the question whether ordinary people prefer a religious or an ethnic identity. Conditions of modern life, a time of flux and dramatic changes, the reality of religious pluralism create an atmosphere in which people feel more comfortable with an ethnic and cultural than a religious identification. Religious diversity, syncretism, pluralism have introduced an era of confusion, uncertainty, doubt, compromise and syncretism which leads to the belief we hear so often that "in the last analysis all religions are alike."

The question is: how do we bring our different interests, ethnic, cultural linguistic, theological perspective and goals to bear on a common Christian Orthodox *martyria*? How do you preserve the Church's faith in its original form and at the same time present it to modern people in a language as understandable and persuasive as possible? It seems to me that Orthodoxy will gain both in honesty and intensity, and it will display the capacity to attract the attention of a global public when, in despite of ethnic particularities, its spokesmen and its faithful not only know their doctrines and beliefs but reveal in daily life that they have lived and experienced the truths they proclaim; that their daily life reflects their theology; that they are able to say "Come and see." More than doctrine, personal experience is what Orthodoxy is all about.

To be sure, Orthodoxy includes certain irreducible ideological components, truths based on the Bible, elaborated upon by Church Fathers in a Greek intellectual and philosophical context. Some of Orthodoxy's truths can be traced directly to Biblical and some to early of patristic ecclesial origin. Thus our task is to take up the task of rendering accounts of realities revealed by the traces and documents of the historical past. But the historical past is a complex phenomenon for it carries along culture. And culture as the fruit of a people's history determines not only the form but frequently even the essence of a people's religious faith. As I have indicated, a study of Christianity of the first five

centuries confirms the truism of the cultural diversity of the Christian faith and the particularities of the nations among which it was disseminated.

The same can be said about later centuries of Christian history. Indigenous tradition in Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, the Slavic world have been Christianized and have become identified with one or another form of Orthodoxy. There is little doubt that Orthodox Christian faith today can be articulated multi-culturally without any sacrifice or reduction of its essence.

A religious identity requires a strong commitment to a specific set of beliefs, prayers, writings, rituals, practices. But in our days, no matter how great a commitment may be it may erode in the presence of other competing religious creeds and antagonistic ideologies. Diversity and religious pluralism undermine religious particularity and tend to make religion a "consumer choice." Under these presuppositions many prefer an ethnic than a religious identification.

The particular, whether ethnic or religious, is natural and Orthodoxy as a universal religion cannot achieve universality by leaping over the particular. Just as we cannot love our neighbors without learning to first love our families, so we cannot achieve the universality of Orthodoxy without affirming our unity with our people and our roots. Universality arises out of the particular, not vice-versa.

Ethnic particularities do not necessarily prevent us in having a common creed, a faith, a ritual and other links which unite all into a body and provide a consciousness that our common faith has a universal appeal. The universality of Orthodoxy is threatened only when Orthodoxy is identified with a particular cultural synthesis which has been elevated to a sacred status and is forced upon the faithful as the ultimate in-human experience.

Orthodoxy's universal appeal lies in the three modes of expression which, speaking in personal terms, give me a profound satisfaction and which I consider of universal interest. First, the verbal. Orthodox theology, thought, belief, doctrine correspond to my longing and to my intellectual quest and spiritual needs. I find Orthodox theology both as mystery and reason, revelation and discovery, faith and knowledge in harmony, balanced and fulfilling. Let me emphasize that Orthodoxy is not a monolithic system of beliefs and practices but a beautiful mosaic of the feeling and imagination, reason and the deeper life of the psyche, individual spirituality and saintliness, ecclesial doxology and diakonia, a bridge between logos and psyche, a theanthropic living organism. The doctrine of the incarnate Logos, that divinity and humanity met in the person of Christ so that humanity may be elevated to divinity, makes a lot of sense to me. I believe that this body of belief must be presented

in a way that appears as an expression of an innate desire and a natural quest—humanly universal.

In addition to theological beliefs, the Orthodox understanding of anthropology appears to me as a system of thought with universal appeal.¹⁵ The nature of the human being, fall, original sin, metamorphosis, redemption, the evolutionary ascesis culminating to eternal life of glorification in God (*theosis*)—are very appealing and believable to me. The emphasis we place on the claims that Orthodoxy is in an unbroken continuity with early Christianity and the church of the Apostles is good in itself and of value when we are in dialogue with fellow-Christians but our sense of anthropology has a non-Christian attraction as well.

The second mode of expression that registers Orthodoxy's universality is feeling and expression; the feelings that overtake us when we celebrate the eucharist; the very personal mystery we live through in the liturgy; the ritual, the movement, the exclamations, indeed the ecstasy we experience in the worship and ritual of our Church corresponds to the needs of the universal person.¹⁶

The third mode of Orthodoxy's universal expression is the iconic, whether aesthetic or imaginative. The iconographic portrayal of the seen and the unseen; the synthesis between the created and the uncreated; the oneness of the living and the dead, divinity and humanity should appeal to human beings who sense their unity with one humanity.¹⁷ Each one of these three modes of religious expression is a dynamic part of Orthodoxy and each one cannot function as an autonomous principle but in association with the other two—three in one and one in three.

It is theology, Christology, anthropology, and related teachings that command the universality of Orthodoxy. Respect for ethnic characteristics and native cultures, and love for the particular is not an impediment to the proclamation and propagation of Orthodoxy's universality. Orthodoxy has rightly adopted a policy in full agreement with the experience of Christianity in history: propagate Orthodox Christianity but resist coercion and assimilation; teach Orthodoxy but avoid oppression and colonization; proclaim the gospel but respect ethnic traits and cultural peculiarities; distrust centralized despotic

¹⁵For a brief but comprehensive account of Orthodox Christian anthropology see Panayotes K. Christou, *To Mysterio tou anthropou* (Thessalonike, 1983); See also John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N. Y., 1985), pp. 27-65 and Ioannis S. Romanides, *To propatorikon amartema*, 2nd ed., (Athens, 1989), esp. pp. 97-152.

¹⁶My article "The Biblical Structure of the Holy Eucharist," in Greek and German, *Kleronomia*, 17, (1985) 73-94; *Beiheft zur Oekumenischen Rundschau*, 54 (1989) 26-45, expresses personal experiences as well as Biblical and Liturgical evidence.

¹⁷See the beautiful and insightful article of Timothy Ware, "The Communion of Saints" in *The Orthodox Ethos*, ed. by A. J. Philippou (Oxford, 1964), pp. 140-49.

Church government but avoid chaotic individualism; establish a form of authority but do not stifle freedom for local autonomy and development; hold on to tradition but do not be afraid of innovation and reinterpretation, Let Orthodoxy remain stable and not static, guided by the principles of *metron* (measure) and *diakrisis* (discernment) in everything.

Early Christianity was never static. It prevailed because it was a spiritual power constantly resilient and adaptable within the currents of thought and the established cultures. Modern Orthodoxy cannot do differently. We should discern the strengths and positive factors which commend Orthodoxy's universality, and identify the negative factors (institutionalism? alliance with power and wealth? inflexible dogmatism?) which mitigate its positive factors.

Orthodoxy has not only survived but even flourished in multi-sectarian and religious plural societies without losing cultural or ethnic characteristics. The loss of ethnic and cultural identity is one of the most negative effects of the spread of Western Christian movements today. In recent years following the decolonization, Christians whether in Africa or Asia are trying hard to re-nativise themselves culturally without discarding the Christian faith they had received from missionaries.

More than the theological dynamics of Orthodoxy's universality must be sought in the practice of *agape*. It was this very principle, the new commandment of love that made early Christianity universally appealing. In the last analysis *agape* is the core of the Christian Gospel. The one unique attribute of God used as a refrain in our liturgical services and prayer life is *philanthropia* and its synonymous *agape*. Orthodox Christianity's God is called *panoiktirmon*, *eleemon*, *evergetes*, *eusplachnos*, the only *philanthropos theos*, whose manifestation of concern for the well being and ultimate salvation of humanity is described as *philanthropia*. It is this evidence that makes Orthodoxy the humanism, the *anthropia*, of Christianity. And what is more universally needed than *philanthropia* in theory and practice? A theology which stresses that God did not leave himself *amartyron*—without manifestation—in all humanity, whether as *spermatikos logos* or *philanthropia*, can not but be attractive and appealing.¹⁸

It was this very principle of the new commandment of *agape* that commended the universality of early Christianity. Christians retained their customs and traditions but put into practice the teachings of Christ.

As the Epistle to Diognetos put it:

¹⁸See my articles "The Lover of Mankind," *The Way*, 9, (1969) 98-106; "A Note on 'Christos Philanthropos' in Byzantine Iconography," *Byzantion*, 46 (1976) 9-12.

The Christians are distinguished from other people neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe . . . Inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities . . . and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display a . . . striking method of life . . . Every foreign country is to them as their native land, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry as do all; they beget children; but they do not commit abortion. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh . . . They display a . . . striking method of life.¹⁹

In addition to Christian authors, non-Christians too, like Galenos the physician, Lukianos the satirist, and Emperor Julian commended Christians as people of self-control, pursuing justice, leading a life of virtue, morality and above all philanthropy. Galenos and Julien in particular were impressed by Christian philanthropy rather than theology and urged the pagan priests to imitate Christian practices.²⁰

Another way to express the unity of the Orthodox is to recount an event that bishop Nikolai Velimirovich observed in Jerusalem on the eve of Resurrection Sunday in the early 1930s.

We waited, and at least our expectations were fulfilled. When the Patriarch sang 'Christ is risen' a heavy burden fell from our souls. We felt as if we also had been raised from the dead. All at once, from all around, the same cry resounded like the noise of many waters. 'Christ is risen' sang the Greeks, the Russians, the Arabs, the Serbs, the Copts, the Armenians, the Ethiopians—one after another, each in his own tongue, in his own melody . . . Coming out from the service at dawn, we began to regard everything in the light of the glory of Christ's Resurrection, and all appeared different from what it had yesterday, everything seemed better, more expressive, more glorious. Only in the light of the Resurrection does life receive meaning.²¹ Whether in Greek, Russian, Arabic, Serbian or any other language, as on the day of the first Pentecost, the Orthodox proclaimed their unity through a common faith,

¹⁹Epistle to Diognetos, 5 ed. by Apostolike Diakonia tes Ekklesias tes Ellados, in the series *Bibliothēke Ellenon Pateron* (Athens, 1955), 1, 253.

²⁰See my *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1968), p. 16; Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London, 1984), pp. 80-83.

²¹Nikolai Velimirovich, "Missionary Letters," *The Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, 24 (1934) 26-27.

expectation, and glorification. Neither ethnic particularities nor language barriers prevented them from expressing a common joyful experience. Their expectations were fulfilled because they all longed patiently for the same redemptive joy. This type of experience can not be communicated by deontologies and rhetorics but by a personal response to "erchou kai eide." To repeat, Orthodoxy's universality can be confirmed by the results of "come and see" "come and experience" for yourself.

As long as ethnic concerns and cultural preferences do not destroy sincere love and interest for each other; as long as ethnic particularities do not compete with allegiance to God's will and commandments as we know them in Scripture and the life of the Church, they should not be forsaken. The Orthodox Church has never refused to participate fully in human culture. The tension between the ideals of the faith and ethnic realities will always be present. In fact this tension is healthy and desirable because it stimulates self-criticism and creativity. And let us not forget that while only theologians and some churchmen are conscious of this tension and the dilemma they find themselves in, the Church *pleroma*, the ordinary believers sense no such a conflict. People say they believe one thing but their mind thinks otherwise; they are pious toward God but they worship their own gods (cf. 2 Kgs 17.33). For them it is difficult to discern the difference between belief and word, pronouncement and practice; what people believe, or what they think they believe based on the fragments of what they say. It is not ethnic particularities but secular cultural forces, a loss of a sense of sin and belief in metaphysical rewards and punishment, religious pluralism and materialistic individualism that count for the decline of the institutionalized church. Precisely because of the attachment to their ethnic identity, including language, most Eastern Orthodox Churches have been able to survive. Every Orthodox church in America owes not only its establishment but its very existence to the ethnic support and solidarity of their founders. Immigrants and first generation "ethnic" Americans continue to serve as the backbone of our churches and institutions. A common ethnic heritage serves basic social, psychological, and cultural needs and is just as important as a common religious experience. But the Church, as a community of living organisms cannot stand still, and it must be able to serve the needs of all kinds of people. Orthodoxy is not the exclusive possession of any one people and the doors should be open to all who seek a faith consistent with the teachings and ethos of the Apostolic faith and undivided Christendom. And those who have "tasted and seen," "searched and found," may want to testify through faith and *praxis*, *pistis*, and *diakonia*, so that others may believe without, however, denying their cultural and ethnic identity,

or expecting those born in the faith to abandon their cultural heritage on their behalf.

The problem of Christian Orthodoxy is not ethnic particularities, which will persist as long as the human situation exists, but lack of sincerity and cordial cooperation, absence of vision and strength; lukewarm commitment to the ideals of Orthodoxy and more concern for the external and the formal. If Orthodoxy is to have universal appeal in the twenty-first century, Orthodox hierarchs and theologians, clergy and laity alike, should engage more in search of new methods for a restatement and reformulation of the old faith.