

The 2nd International Conference on Mission

The Academy of Theological Studies of Volos Greece hosted the 2nd Conference organized by the International Orthodox Theological Association (I.O.T.A.) This four-day International Theological Conference on the theme: "Mission and the Orthodox Church", was held from January 11 to 15, 2023, in the city of Volos, with English as the working language.

The aforementioned International Conference was attended by approximately 350 expert speakers covering 28 fields of study. The speakers traveled to Volos from many countries in America, Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa, the Balkans and Russia and among them were bishops from various Orthodox Churches and dozens of clergy and monks.

The Conference focused on the role and importance of the Mission, understood as the presence and action of Orthodoxy in the modern world. The keynote speaker of the Conference was the Metropolitan of Korea and Exarch of Japan Ambrosios. **The Effects of Ethnophyletism in Spreading Orthodox Witness “to all the Nations”: The case of Korea.**

Here is the full speech:

The Effects of Ethnophyletism in Spreading Orthodox Witness “to all the Nations”: The case of Korea

by Metropolitan AMBROSIOS of Korea and Exarch of Japan

On January 24, 2022, I was honored with an invitation to be the keynote speaker during this 2nd Conference of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA), centering on the topic of Orthodox Mission. I am very grateful to the Conference organizers and to the Most Reverend Metropolitan Ignatios of Dimitrias and Almyros for their kind invitation and generous hospitality.

I began preparing my speech with caution and awe. I was mindful both of the huge responsibility of this special opportunity, and of the fact that the keynote speaker in 2019 in Iasi, Romania was the internationally renowned Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, of blessed memory. May we continue to have his prayers and may his memory be eternal!

Exactly one month after I received this invitation to speak, however, things changed radically in terms of “Orthodox mission and witness to the world.” As we all know, on February 24, 2022, the abominable war in Ukraine escalated on a massive scale. I immediately knew that I had to change the subject and nature of my speech, because I believe it is unacceptable for a meeting of Orthodox theologians to simply converse about “theories” at a time when worldwide Orthodoxy is being presented and judged externally by global public opinion based on concrete facts, based on bombs and body counts; and at a time when worldwide Orthodoxy is also being tested internally, by the shocking and convicting reality of one predominantly Orthodox country invading and violently attacking another predominantly Orthodox country. In good conscience, what inspiring words can we possibly speak about “Orthodox witness to the nations” within this current historical reality?

Furthermore, it is an unspeakable travesty not only that this war is Orthodoxy’s current “witness to the world,” but that most Orthodox leaders worldwide have failed to condemn this diabolical war unequivocally. We cannot even say, “well this is a war driven by politicians, our Churches are against it,” because so few of our Church leaders have actually taken a public anti-war stance. Having said this, I do want to commend IOTA for publishing a clear and immediate anti-war statement on your website.

Since this is a gathering of theologians, focusing on the theme of Orthodox witness, in the midst of the current war, its keynote speech should examine the missiological heresy which lies at the root of the war: the great heresy of ethnophyletism.¹ According to His Eminence Metropolitan Ioannis (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, ethnophyletism is nothing less than: “The greatest danger to the unity of the Orthodox Church.”² It is important to emphasize, right from the start, that whoever claims to work for the Church and at the same time serves ethnophyletism, betrays in practice the very nature of the Church.

¹ See Panteleimon Rodopoulos (Metropolitan of Tyroloi and Serention), “Geographical jurisdiction according to Orthodox Canon Law - The phenomenon of ethnophyletism in recent times”, *Μελέται Β΄, Νομοκανονικά - Ιστορικοκανονικά και άλλα*, Thessalonica: Πατριαρχικὸν Ἰδρυμα Πατερικῶν Μελετῶν, Ἀνάλεκτα Βλατάδων 66, 2008, 72: “Ethnophyletism is a phenomenon of the late 18th and 19th centuries, a known product of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It is the new political theory, on the basis of which the national states of Europe and indeed of the Balkan Peninsula were created, which is unfortunately still being applied today in the Balkans with the known consequences to the lives of the peoples of the region and to peace”.

² Ioannis Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamos, *Κόσμον Λύτρον. Τά Ἀγαθόνικεια*, Ἐδεργέτις, Megara of Attica 2014, 184.

Since much has already been written about ethnophyletism's history within Orthodoxy, and because I am quite sure the members of IOTA are well-informed about ethnophyletism as a heresy within our Tradition, I will instead analyze, in a more personal way, the effects of ethnophyletism upon our efforts to spread Orthodox witness to the nations. My analysis is based on my experiences for several decades in the Far East, especially in Korea, where I have been serving since 1998. After this, I will conclude with a few suggestions for how we can move beyond ethnophyletism and toward an authentic Orthodox witness.

I am taking this more personal and less 'academic' approach because, when I discuss the matter with Orthodox theologians and church leaders, it seems that most of them have not grasped the enormous problems ethnophyletism causes to our theology, or the terrible consequences of rampant ethnophyletism upon Orthodox missions. Perhaps this is because they have not experienced the problems directly or suffered this heresy's consequences on a personal level.

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The negative effects of ethnophyletism in many areas of Church life is a very sad reality. However, the most serious negative impact is in the area of evangelizing the nations.

The promising revival of Orthodox witness in the 20th century is being endangered by the serious problems that arose after the fall of communist regimes in so-called "Orthodox countries," some of which have sought to expand into other ecclesiastical jurisdictions. In other words, after communism's collapse in eastern Europe, instead of pursuing an approach to Orthodox missions for the 21st Century that was based on proper Orthodox Ecclesiology and Canon Law, competitive politics based on ethno-racial criteria prevailed.

We are all aware of the scandal suffered by Orthodox believers of different jurisdictions from the uncanonical situation prevailing in the Orthodox diaspora. However, many of us may not see the enormous scandal caused by this canonical anomaly to non-Orthodox, non-Christians and non-religious people. The heresy of ethnophyletism is "*a stumbling block to the weak*" (1 Cor. 8:9) and threatens to destroy the genuine criteria for spreading Orthodox witness. We Orthodox resisted colonialism, which contaminated the preaching of Christ with violence and

scandalized countless souls who might otherwise have embraced the faith. Yet, unfortunately, we Orthodox gave in to ethnophyletism, a flesh-eating microbe that eats away at the Church, the body of Christ, and causes many problems to those "inside" and "outside", as Saint John Chrysostom would say. In other words, ethnophyletism becomes a reason for the Orthodox to be sad, the heterodox to be scandalized and the atheists to rejoice!

Thus, the question arises: how is it possible to approach non-Orthodox, non-Christians, and non-religious people, when in the same city, and sometimes even in the same neighborhood, there are Orthodox churches belonging to different jurisdictions, each of which "invites" the same people into their community by saying: "Come, come to us; don't go there"? This sad phenomenon is reminiscent of divorced couples, where each parent insists on exclusively claiming custody of their suffering child!

When some clerics infiltrate foreign jurisdictions, they are acting like the "alien bishops" (ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος) and troublemakers about whom the Apostle Peter warns us (1 Pet. 4:15). Such clergy even dare to appear as conquerors by using treacherous and illegal means, which are condemned even by the common criminal law; they occupy holy churches and remove native clergy from the local canonical Church using immoral bait. Consider the recent uncanonical incursion of the Moscow Patriarchate into Africa, a fact that has caused immeasurable distress to the Primate and the faithful of the ancient and historic Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa. We must seriously ask ourselves, how shall we do missionary work to 'outsiders' if we are fighting among ourselves?

The heresy of ethnophyletism brought the Church of Christ to this deplorable state. What I am describing here with great pain of soul is not simply the result of what I have read or heard from others. It is my direct experience of recent years in Korea.

Let me say up front that our ministry, with the grace of God, is always done with an ecumenical and never an ethnic spirit. For example, we never use the word "Greek" in referring to the Orthodox Church in Korea—we are, simply, "the Orthodox Metropolis of

Korea.”³ We strive here to follow faithfully the Holy Great Church of Christ, which, in the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “never served nationalism, which is an alienation from the consciousness of the Church’s universality and the abolition of the principle of synodality in it.”⁴

For those who are unfamiliar with the existing situation in Korea, let me note, epigrammatically, that Orthodoxy in Korea began in 1900 with clergymen sent by the Church of Russia⁵. In 1908, by a decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, the responsibility of the missionary work in Korea was transferred from the Metropolitan of Saint Petersburg to the Bishop of Vladivostok⁶. And from 1900 to 1917 the Russian clergy developed significant activity in Korea. However, after the Russian Revolution, all assistance from the Church of Russia stopped. At that time, the Korean nation was already occupied, beginning in 1910, by harsh Japanese colonialists, a period of suffering which lasted until 1945. In 1921, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the small Orthodox community in Seoul was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Russian Archbishop of Tokyo, which continued until June 29, 1949, the date on which the last Archimandrite Polikarp Priimak] (1936–1949), was expelled from Korea, after having been accused of spying for the Russian communist regime.

Thus, from 1917 onwards, the Orthodox Community in Seoul struggled greatly due to the prevailing abnormal political situation. Cut off from support back home, the Russian Orthodox envoys were forced to sell the properties they had acquired in order to survive; they also

³ An obvious proof of this is that the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is supranational, never used the word "Greek" in the title of the Church in Korea. The official title of our Church in Korea at the Seat of the Metropolis, in all the parishes, in the logo, on the letterheads and in every printed edition is in Korean and English 한국 정교회 대교구/ Orthodox Metropolis of Korea.

⁴ Speech by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the opening of the Conference "The problem of ethnophyletism in the Orthodox Church: From the Bulgarian Schism until today" (Halki, September 12, 2019).

⁵ For the establishment of an Orthodox Russian Mission in Korea, see Archimandrite Feodosii Perevalov: "*Rossiiskaja Dukhovnaja Missija v Koree, 1900-1925*" (The Russian Mission in Korea, 1900-1925) in "*Istoriya Possiskoi Doukhovnoi Missii v Koree*" (History of the Russian Mission in Korea - Moscow, published by the Brotherhood of St. Vladimir, 1999), pp. 173-179. On the History of the Orthodox Church in Korea, see Andreas Heliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea, A Brief History of the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Foundation of the Orthodox Mission to the Far East 2005, and Aristotle-Ambrose Zographos (Metropolitan of Korea and Exarch of Japan), "Orthodox Witness in the Korean Peninsula. A Historical Approach", *Korean Church, God's Mission, Global Christianity*, ed. By Wonsuk Ma and Kyo Seong Ahn, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 26, Oxford Center for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK, 2015, 101-113.

⁶ See Feodosii Perevalov, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

appealed to the non-Orthodox for financial support⁷. Furthermore, imagine what the Orthodox Community in Seoul experienced when they were placed under the jurisdictional care of the Russian Metropolitan of Tokyo! How was it possible for the Korean Orthodox faithful to receive the slightest spiritual support when relations between the two countries were absolutely hostile, because of Japan's terrible colonization of Korea, and when any movement from one country to another was strictly prohibited⁸?

The young Orthodox community in Korea was, therefore, essentially orphaned for decades during the Japanese occupation and continuing into the aftermath of the Second World War, which put them in great spiritual danger when the Korea Civil War was being fought (1950-1953). During the Korean War, the Orthodox Koreans built spiritual relationships with the Greek Expeditionary Force (E.C.F.), whose chaplains and soldiers ministered to them and helped them tremendously. When the Korean War ended in 1953, the Orthodox in Korea were "headless", since they did not belong to any ecclesiastical jurisdiction; so they asked for help from the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

A letter signed by 192 members of the Orthodox Community of Seoul⁹ on Christmas Day 1955 was sent to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras; His All-Holiness and the Holy and Sacred Synod around him considered the Korean faithful's heartfelt request and assigned the Orthodox Community of Seoul as an Exarchy of the Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate; later it was assigned to the Archdiocese of North and South America and, finally, after the separation of New Zealand from the Australian

⁷ Characteristic of the difficult situation in which the Russian missionaries found themselves after 1917 is the fact that they asked for help from the Anglican Bishop Mark Trollope (28/3/1862-6/11/1930), who gave to the Orthodox missionary group in Seoul monthly financial support of 250 - 300 yen for nineteen months (June 1918 - December 1919). The total amount of assistance amounted to 5,100 yen and was given in the form of a "loan of love", with no conditions for its return.

⁸ This reference is made because, while in practice all communication and assistance from the Moscow Patriarchate in Korea had stopped, the Russian narrative that "the Greeks took their church" is being deliberately spread!

⁹ The letter that was sent referred to the unanimous decision of the General Assembly of the Seoul Orthodox Community, which was taken after the Christmas Divine Liturgy of 1955. It was signed by 192 members of the Seoul Orthodox Community, aged 18 and over, of which 84 were men and 108 women. The list with the names of the faithful, who signed the letter, some in the traditional Korean way, i.e. with a personal seal (:도장장구) and others with their fingerprint, is originally found in the Archives of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and in copy in the Archives of the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, in Korean and English. See unpublished letter of Fr. Boris Moon to Archbishop Michael of America, dated 1/1/1956. *Archives of the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea*.

Archdiocese in 1970, the Exarchate of Korea became part of the newly established Metropolis of New Zealand and Exarchate of Korea and the Far East. This is how we arrived in 2004, when the Exarchate of Korea was elevated to the Metropolis of Korea and Exarchate of Japan. The Orthodox witness in Korea and its expansion in the wider region of East Asia is due largely to the vigilant missionary care of the late Metropolitan of Pisidia Soterios (Trampas), who worked tirelessly for 33 years (1975-2008) like none - other before him.

Soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, the claims of the Moscow Patriarchate began in Korea, under the constant pretext that it was necessary to establish a Russian jurisdiction there in order to cover the needs of the newly arrived Russian immigrants in the Korean Peninsula.

When the first wave of Russians and other Slavic speakers arrived in Korea in 1992, Metropolitan Soterios of Pisidia (the Former Metropolitan of Korea), now of blessed memory, took over their liturgical and pastoral care with a genuine ecclesiastical attitude. First of all, he oversaw the construction of the holy chapel of Saint Maximus the Greek in Seoul, the foundation stone of which was laid by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, during His first official visit in 1995. Also, Metropolitan Soterios arranged, through the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for a Russian priest to come from the Moscow Patriarchate to take over the pastoral care of the Slavonic people and to serve under his homoforion—that is, under the 'local bishop' in Korea. Thus, Koreans and Slavic speakers, as well as believers of other nationalities of the Orthodox diaspora in Korea, coexisted in complete harmony under the paternal care of a single Bishop on the Korean peninsula.

Unfortunately, this reality lasted only until Christmas 2018 when, despite our numerous appeals to the ecclesiastical and diplomatic agents of Russia, the Moscow Patriarchate decided to destroy the normal ecclesiastical order in Korea. The great harm done by our Moscow Patriarchate brothers lies in the fact that the Orthodox Church of Korea functioned previously as a "model" local Orthodox Church. That is, it was a unique case of the existence

of "a single Bishop in the same place"¹⁰, for all the Orthodox, regardless of race, language, ethnic and cultural identity.

The Russian ethnophyletic argument was and still is that they have an 'obligation' (sic) to care for their flock. To our argument that "the Russian immigrants in Korea already have a pastor along with everything else they need for their liturgical and pastoral needs," the Moscow Patriarchate replied, "yes, but they need their mother Church"! And when they realized that their 'argument' was in violation of Orthodoxy's canonical tradition, their response was: "Any way there is a place for missionary activity for everyone in Korea!"¹¹

We reminded the Moscow Patriarchate that "the heterodox use exactly the same argument with a light conscience, since they are not bound by any ecclesiology, that's why they establish new churches wherever they want and do whatever they wish. By the Moscow Patriarchate's own flawed logic, the Church of Greece could claim to acquire ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Korea within which the Archbishop of Athens and of all Greece would be commemorated in Korea, on the grounds that for the last 70 years the Church of Greece has continuously helped the Church in Korea with human resources and material support, or because Greece sacrificed hundreds of soldiers for the freedom of Korea during the Korean War, or because many Greeks live in Korea today as professors, businessmen, workers, students, etc. Would this claim ever be accepted as normal by the Orthodox Church around the world? And if other Orthodox Churches do the same as the Russian Church, thinking to themselves "since the Patriarchate of Moscow is doing it, why don't we do it, too?", then will anything of our Orthodox ecclesiology be left standing? Here I should mention that it is to the honor and praise of the late military priests of the Greek Expeditionary Forces that they never thought

¹⁰ Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, (Kolymbari, Crete, June 16-25, 2016), *The Orthodox Diaspora*, 1b.

¹¹ See Panteleimon Rodopoulos, op. cit., 71: "Outside the geographical limits of the normal jurisdiction of local Churches, the execution of missionary work by their members and on their behalf is illegal and ecclesiologically unacceptable. However, it can become canonical and ecclesiologically acceptable only if the local Church invites specific persons-missionaries from other local Churches, whose missionary work is placed under the local canonical bishop, by commemorating during the holy Services only the local bishop, and performing the missionary and pastoral work in the name of the local bishop and only, so that it is normal, genuine and incontestable. Otherwise, it is about "cross-border" intervention and "intrusion" into a foreign province, which are expressly prohibited by the sacred rules and decisions of Ecumenical Councils".

of taking advantage of their mission in Korea in order to invade a foreign ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

This is not the place for a detailed account of what is happening today in Korea. Suffice it to say that the faithful in Korea have been scandalized profoundly by the abnormal behavior of some of the representatives of the newly established parish under the Moscow Patriarchate, which they maintain in a rented hall. How many tears we have seen Russian and Belarusian adults and children shed because they have been divided and their friendships have been destroyed! Some representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate have also made a painful impression on our Korean clergy, whom they dared to call in order to convince them to leave the Korean Church under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, saying we are “schismatic”, and to come, instead under the jurisdiction of Russia!

As we mentioned above, even more serious is the problem of the creation of a new non-canonical jurisdiction which has caused a scandal towards the non-Orthodox in Korea. During our joint meetings at the Commission for Theological Dialogue and at the General Assemblies of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK), in which we participate actively, we are often asked: “what is it that we hear? What's going on with the Russians? Are there multiple Eastern Orthodox Churches in Korea now”? How are we supposed to answer? We limit ourselves to saying that we pray and hope that this sad story ends soon.

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Thoughts on Overcoming the Problem of Ethnophyletism.

Our motivation for arguing the issue is not, as you can understand, polemic or political. It is rather an issue that hurts us deeply, and the question is how shall we move beyond this impasse. To what extent do we want to “live in a way worthy of Him who called us to the new life” (Eph. 4:1) according to St. Paul? Our preoccupation with the problem of ethno-racialism is in direct connection with our fidelity to the character of our Christian identity. In other words, do we want to follow politics, prioritizing ethnicity and race, or follow the Church, prioritizing our united identity in Christ? This is where the essence of the whole matter is focused. Again, St. Paul's words are instructive, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal

3:28)

Due to ethnophyletism, many actions of ecclesiastical officials are not ecclesiastical at all, but clearly political. Yet, these Church actions are dressed, so insidiously and deceptively, with an "ecclesiastical" cover, making it easy for some to proclaim: "this is an ecclesiastical act"! The misfortune is that these events and practices are "baptized" as ecclesiastical acts and most people do not even suspect the infiltration of "Caesaropapism" into the Church. Some of the Church's clergy have fallen into the trap of promoting national instead of ecclesiastical interests; of worshiping worldly power and authority. Therefore, today, just as with the Bulgarian issue in the past, "the worldly interest is being placed above the spiritual and religious"¹². Numbers and population data have become a criterion of Church decision making¹³. For example, ceremonies are held with the participation of numerous Prelates, and while at first sight it seems this is an ecclesiastical act, nevertheless, in the background, the Mystery of the Mysteries, turns into a political act, which aims to demonstrate power and authority. In other words, from the percentage of participation of Prelates of various jurisdictions, this functional event aims to draw conclusions about who has the "upper hand" in the matter of Primacy! Such unacceptable mixtures of ecclesiastical and political action causes confusion to many members of the Church, because most of the time they do not have the knowledge to distinguish the boundaries between the Church and the world. As a result, we "educate" the faithful, by our own actions, to confuse these limits. Yet, how many of us really understand the danger this poses for our Church and for our Theology?

¹² *Proceedings of the Holy and Great Synod in Constantinople*, Mansi, 45, 486C. *Πρακτικά τῆς ἁγίας καὶ μεγάλης συνόδου τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει*, Mansi, 45, 486C.

¹³ See, for example, the ethno-racial reasoning of the Bulgarians for the creation of the anti-canonical Bulgarian Exarchate within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in *the Proceedings of the Holy Great Synod in Constantinople*, Mansi, 45, 467, g: "In ... the provinces, in which there are mixed Greeks and Bulgarians, the prelate should be elected by the province from that nation which is more numerous, given that if the Greeks are more, let him be a Greek, but if the Bulgarians are more, let him be a Bulgarian".

At a conference in Greece in June 2018, in the presence of representatives from various Orthodox Churches, when a Russian Metropolitan from Europe heard me develop the problem that exists with the demands of the Moscow Patriarchate in Korea, asked me: "How many Greeks are there in Korea? "Just a few", I answered. "How many Russians are there in Korea", he asked again. "Much too many" I replied in an emphatic way, since I knew his reasoning in advance. Then, in a raised voice, he formulated his conclusion: "Well, why do you say that it is illegal to have a Russian jurisdiction in Korea"? "Because the criteria of canonical jurisdictions in the Orthodox Church were never numerical but geographical", I answered.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, writes: "Ethnophyletism has led to the weakening of the conscience about the eucharistic realization of the Church. In the name of nationalistic purposes, the priority of the eschatological identity of the Church and eucharistic ecclesiology as well have been sacrificed. The instrumentalization of the Eucharist and its transformation into a means of exercising ecclesiastical politics and pressures, - as it is done today in the case of the Ukrainian Autocephaly by the Church of Moscow - proves the continued presence of ethnic criteria in the ecclesiastical life of Orthodoxy, as well as the need to resist such practices, and the need to return to the beginnings of the eucharistic formation and synodical function of the Orthodox Church."¹⁴

How can the Church deal in practice with this serious problem? Ethnophyletists have means at their disposal that anti-ethnophyletists lack. And the problem is that the secular means they use are more understandable in today's society, because they match the mentality and habits of modern people. However, this reality is the epitome of the negative spirit of secularization. Few people understand or experience a genuine ecclesiastical attitude. Thus, not until the multitudes 'wake up' and understand that such secular thinking is foreign to the Church's proper ethos, a false "tradition" will have been formed (if it has not already been formed!) which will not be easily restored.

Due to the lack of authentic ecclesiological practice, when we discuss the problem of ethnophyletism in the Orthodox diaspora, the usual reaction is that different jurisdictions existing in the same place is "natural and self-evident" or, at the very least, a "necessary evil"! In my humble opinion, this reaction has an absolutely clear reason: We Orthodox believers around the world are not actually the Body of Christ. We feel that we are not brothers in Christ, but strangers. As much as we repeat in theory that "we are connected by our shared Orthodoxy," in practice, our national identity has priority and our Orthodox faith comes second. First we are Russians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Arabs, etc., and second

¹⁴ A Speech by HAH the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the at the opening of the Conference: "The problem of ethnophyletism in the Orthodox Church: From the Bulgarian Schism until today" (Halki, September 12, 2019). Characteristic of the instrumentalization of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist is the fact that, we are aware of some specific cases of Russian believers, who, when they visit their homeland to see their relatives, the Russian priests of their parishes there, when they learn that they are affiliated with the Metropolis of Korea of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, they forbid them from participating in the Holy Eucharist, with the intention of forcing them to stop belonging to the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea!

comes our Orthodox identity.¹⁵ Thus, there is no deep desire to address ethnophyletism in the Diaspora, since it would require a spiritual revolution within our identities.

It is absolutely necessary for us to understand that the nation, which is a worldly reality that will be abolished at the last days (ἔσχατα), should not for any reason be converted into an ecclesiastical criterion that destroys the unity of the Church. And since national criteria often underlie decision-making at a personal, local or pan-orthodox level, how can one check each time whether his or her criteria are ecclesiastical or ethnocentric? A sure proof of an ethnoracial mentality, which places the ethnic identity of a believer above his ecclesiastical identity, is when, for example, they feel more familiar with an atheist or non-Christian fellow countryman than with an Orthodox believer of a different nationality.

At this point, we consider it very useful to quote the words of Saint Sophrony Sakharov, since this great theologian of our Church clarifies the matter beautifully. He writes: "I do not know a Greek Christ, a Russian Christ, an English Christ, an Arab Christ ... Christ for me is everything, a supra-cosmic Being. ... When we demote the Person of Christ, when we bring Him down to the level of nationalities, we automatically lose everything and fall into darkness. Then the way is open for hatred between nations, for enmity between social groups"¹⁶. The word of Saint Sophrony is particularly important nowadays when, from the lips of certain clerics ethnoracial chants are being uttered about the "Philhellenic God", the "philo-Russian God" etc.

How many wars between Orthodox countries have taken place for reasons of ethnophyletism? And how many civil conflicts were not caused by the division of the citizens of a country into pro-Russian, pro-Hellenic, pro-Serb, etc.? Today's problem, just as it used to be with newspapers and the printed word in general, has entered the electronic world and is

¹⁵ In our contacts with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate or with Russian diplomats, who put forward to us the anti-church "argument" of the type "we are Russian and we want a Russian church in Korea", we simply tell them that, "we are not Greek, but Orthodox. And that the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not send us to Korea as Greeks but as Orthodox shepherds and workers of the Gospel".

¹⁶ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Words of Life*, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1998, 20-21. See also Dn. Perry Hamalis, "What has Korea to do with Ukraine? Russia's Tragic Assault on Korean Unity", in *The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Ukraine Autocephaly, Historical, Canonical, and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. By Evagelos Sotiropoulos, Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, May 2019, 31.

becoming a "war" between pro-Russian or anti-Russian web pages, etc. Instead of standing next to each other as brothers and sisters, our ethnophyletism separates us into opposing groups - coalitions, ready for war. This is a huge problem. Our ethnophyletism makes us heretics, because we do not place Christ and His Church above everything. Christ is not everything in our life. What St. Cyril of Jerusalem calls the "body and fellowship of Christ,"¹⁷ is, for us, inferior to our national or ethnic DNA. The language of love is of lower value than our national language and our cultural heritage. Can we completely believe our own words when, during pan-Orthodox concelebrations of the Divine Liturgy, we claim that "the variety of national traditions ... confirms the unity of Orthodoxy in the community of faith and the bond of love"¹⁸?

Our ethnophyletism is why we are frightened by the mere thought of a multi-ethnic congregation. We are afraid of losing our individuality,¹⁹ and we come to the easy conclusion that in order to have worship in our language, and to preserve our ethnic and cultural traditions, we must necessarily have "our own Church", which, in the final analysis, looks more like an ethnic ghetto than a Church in a foreign country where we live as an Orthodox diaspora.

However, despite the massiveness of the problem, there is a solution. Glory be to God, solutions have been recorded in the book of Acts as well as in the decisions of the Ecumenical and Local Synods. Therefore, we contemporary Christians, if we put aside our ethno-racial micro-politics, can find solutions about language issues, the issue of the nationality of our bishops and priests, as well as about everything else. If we truly want authentic Orthodoxy in the Diaspora, we need to leave outside the door of our church the political expediencies of our place of origin. My own personal experience from working for nearly three decades on

¹⁷ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechism* 4:1.

¹⁸ *Regulation of the Operation of Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora*, article 5:b. Korea was not included in the areas where Episcopal Assemblies were established because precisely in the Orthodox Diaspora in Korea there was no problem of irregularity until December 2018.

¹⁹ See Panteleimon Rodopoulos, *op. cit.*, 78: "The implementation of the canonical order in the new provinces of the so-called Orthodox Diaspora does not mean uniformity in the parishes. Today's pastoral reality, but also expediency, do not allow the assimilation of one under the other and the levelling of everything. Besides, as we see in the Gospel, Jesus Christ, "the good shepherd" and "Chief Shepherd" of the Church, did not despise the cultural elements of His environment; He did not crush what was dear to man, but used these elements in order to communicate with man and save him. Man must surely keep his faith in the supreme of everything, but without disdain for his culture and without cutting off from his roots".

the model of Orthodoxy in Korea—that is, the multinational church community under one bishop—has firmly convinced me that, not only is it possible to return to the “normal canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church”²⁰ (after all, that was the purpose of the Episcopal Assemblies, the Decision which was signed in 2009 by all Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Chambessy, without any exception), but also that our compliance with Canon Law will become a source of great blessing and infinite joy, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, since we will live in an atmosphere of Pentecost and communion, in every worship gathering with our brothers and sisters.

For the ethnophyletists, who are willing to sacrifice the ecumenical character of the Church on the altar of their nationalistic interests, perhaps the most important and vivid testimony of the proper application of the ecumenical spirit of Orthodoxy is the Athonite State. The Holy Mountain is an ecumenical state, with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople being its Shepherd, in which many monks of different nationalities have lived harmoniously for centuries to this day. The criterion and point of reference for their coexistence is not their ethnic origin but their Orthodox faith. Occasional attempts by external political and ecclesiastical factors of Slavic countries, mainly, in the 19th century, and especially of Tsarist Russia, which were based on an organized plan (pan-Slavism) for their descent into the Mediterranean, have been recorded in the tablets of History²¹, as they tried to alter the ecumenical identity of the Holy Mountain with ethnic criteria; yet, they did not succeed. As much as the people of the Moscow Patriarchate repeat from time to time that the Holy Monastery of Panteleimon is "their Monastery, Russian monastery (sic!)", it is known to all those who have a basic knowledge of ecclesiastical matters that the Holy Mountain belongs ecclesiastically to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and that the Ecumenical Patriarch is commemorated day and night as the spiritual father and bishop of all the monks, including those at Panteleimon. Having Mount Athos as a model, let us organize our Metropolises and Parishes in the Orthodox diaspora, in the same way, in order to have God's blessing and to bear fruitful witness to "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2) in the world.

²⁰ Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, (Kolymbari, Crete, June 16-25, 2016), *The Orthodox Diaspora*, A:1.

²¹ See Diogenis Karagiannakidis, *Τα ραβάνια της Μεγίστης Λαύρας 1912-1913. Η περίοδος απελευθέρωσης του Αγίου Όρους και των ρωσικών διεκδικήσεων*, Aeolos, Mount Athos: Holy Monastery of the Great Lavra, 2018.

My beloved,

Along with our fervent prayer for the abolition of heretical ethnophyletism within our Orthodox Church, let us clearly condemn it at the present International Conference of Orthodox Theologians, both theoretically and in practice. Let us take a public position on what is abnormal and uncanonical today in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Far East, in Latin America, in Europe and in Asia Minor, but also in the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Africa. Let us send a message of support to everyone who is suffering from the war in Ukraine, using theological, not political criteria, emphasizing that: "there is no greater sin than war"²². Let us reject without any discussion the unorthodox theology of war, which for the last eleven months is being reproduced by the supporters of the war in Ukraine. Let us emphasize that we are neither with NATO nor with Putin, but only with Christ. We are not part of any worldly coalition but only members of the Church, the One Body of Christ. Let us strive for a change of mentality and the acquisition of a genuine Orthodox ecclesiastical mind, for the glory of God and the further expansion of His uncreated Church on earth, in the era of digitization and information technology. Let the prioritization of the national over the Orthodox Christian identity finally stop. And let all Orthodox theologians agree that ethnophyletism is diametrically opposed to the work of proclaiming the Gospel, because it is based exclusively on the blood of the ancestors, while the Church is based on the Blood of Christ.

Thank you so very much for your kind patience.

²² See Saint Sophrony of Essex, *Letters to Russia*, 2009, p. 235: "... There is no greater sin than wars, ... especially in our age, where all men in one way or another are drawn into *fratricide*; today some rejoice because hundreds of thousands were killed, and millions more from the other side; tomorrow those who suffered rejoice, because the murderers were revenged. Thus, the whole earth is covered by the darkness of diabolical hatred, the Holy Spirit leaves the souls of people and despair settles in their hearts".