

# **An OCL Board Member Responds to the Message of Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate**

*George Michalopoulos*<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Introduction: An Archimandrite Speaks**

Recently, a certain archimandrite, the Very Rev. Dr. Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, spoke at Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> His position is one of auxiliary professor at this seminary but his formal title is “Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod.” His remarks thus were more than the observations of a mere academic; indeed he stated from the outset that they were authorized by the Ecumenical Patriarch himself and “with the consent” of Archbishop Demetrios, the primate of the Greek archdiocese.

---

<sup>1</sup> This letter was originally published on the Orthodox Christian Laity website <[www.ocl.org](http://www.ocl.org)>, and subsequently reprinted by the American orthodox Institute <<http://www.aoiusa.org/blog/2009/03/ocl-responds-to-ep-talk-at-holy-cross/>> The original publication was dated March 25, 2009 – the Feast of the Annunciation (editor’s note).

<sup>2</sup> See “Challenges of Orthodoxy in America” in the current issue of *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity (CJOC)* (editor’s note).

What began as astute observations of American Orthodoxy by a highly educated clergyman-scholar quickly descended into vituperation, slander against other jurisdictions, and almost total ignorance of America. Moreover, his understanding of canon law and Byzantine history itself was questionable. It is unknown whether this was deliberate or merely the result of ignorance. At best, this willful twisting of history can be viewed as Phanariote propaganda, which like all good propaganda uses words and ideas for some higher purpose. The purpose of this reply is not only to identify that which is propagandistic, but to point out the severe internal and logical contradictions contained therein.

It has been reported that several of those who attended his lecture left in disgust in the midst of his speech and that of those who remained, disgruntled comments were audible upon the completion of his oration. The following day, during a private meeting with the faculty of Holy Cross, clear disagreements were enunciated towards him and his views. Others have pointed out in the interim that his speech should be viewed by many as the intellectual case (such as it is) of the Phanar regarding the claims it will press at the upcoming "Pan-Orthodox Synod" which is in the planning stages at present. Given his standing at the Phanar, his speech deserves serious consideration. More importantly, as seen within the turmoil of the GOA in the aftermath of the Ligonier Conference in 1994, the Phanar's capabilities for mischief cannot be underestimated. (Henceforth, for purposes of brevity, I will refer to Archimandrite Lambrianides as "the speaker" and his remarks as "the speech.")

## **II. The Nature of the Speech: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Errors**

The speech fails on several points. First, it contained invalid statements which rendered it illogical and self-contradictory. Second, it contained historical errors. Third, many of its ecclesiological arguments are untenable. Finally, its expositions on canon law call into question whether the Holy Synod of Constantinople understands the reasons, origins, and the contexts of some very basic canons (to say nothing of the nature of the episcopate).

First, he is correct in observing that the "appearance and development (of Orthodoxy) in America was influenced by certain indeterminable factors." A distillation of his views are as follows: (1) a heightened lay involvement, (2) Protestant models of parish formation and incorporation, (3) the view of the parish as membership in a club, and (4) a resultant dearth of spirituality. These are correct as far as they go and many other thoughtful Orthodox commentators have likewise commented on them as well, as any perusal of the various internet websites can attest.

Second, he correctly points out that the plural jurisdictional model is clearly un-canonical. As well, he correctly perceives that the local jurisdictions were set up according to national origin, hence the multiplicity of overlapping ethnic jurisdictions. He rightly lays down a gauntlet when he states that "according to ecclesiological principles, in any given region that can be one and only one bishop who shepherds the Orthodox faithful, regardless of nationalistic distinction." This proves that the speaker is aware of the ecclesial norms of the first Christian millennium as well as the findings of the council of Constantinople held in 1872, which condemned the heresy of

phyletism, which is after all, the fount of *all* ethnic jurisdictions in North America.

Third, he has an understanding of the driving force behind Orthodox immigration to the United States, which was economic. Unfortunately what follows from this point is largely a caricature of the motives, intents, and development of the various phenomena that have arisen in America since the first immigrants arrived. Though his critique contains kernels of truth, its generalizations are damaging to his thesis overall. Were all immigrants ashamed of their culture? Then why did so many insist on celebrating their liturgies in their native tongues? Why did they set up ethnic organizations centered around their parishes? Were all eager to assimilate? Then why was endogamy so prized and those that married out of their ethnicity ostracized? Clearly, the picture is more ambiguous. Dinner-dances at the various parish halls throughout America were for the most part indistinguishable from those in the villages of the Old World.

The historical misunderstandings continue. Interestingly enough, the speaker does not mention at all the first appearance of Orthodoxy on the North American continent. This is most telling, indeed, it appears to be intentional. Why? Because it is only by ignoring the founding of the first mission in 1794, that his comments can be granted any saliency whatsoever. It is akin in fact to giving a lecture about the civil rights movement in the United States without mentioning slavery, the War Between the States or Reconstruction. As such, the speaker presents a picture of hordes of penniless immigrants who were ashamed of their origins and only wanted to assimilate as quickly as possible into the dominant culture. Like the Protestant natives, they had only one goal on their agenda: to make money and become American. This picture ignores the fact that Orthodoxy first came to America as a *missionary* faith, intent on ministering to the

natives of North America. Although the mission's impetus was overwhelmed by massive waves of immigrants who were already Orthodox, it was not forgotten by the hierarchs who established the first archdiocese on this continent. Conversions were promoted and the history of American Orthodoxy attests to this phenomenon, both among the natives of Alaska and the thousands of Uniates who were received back into the Faith. (In addition, individual Anglo-Americans and even African-Americans were converted to Orthodoxy during this time). The final address of St Tikhon to his American flock bears this out: he exhorted his hearers to not forget their primary calling, but to "take care to spread it among the non-Orthodox." Indeed, it was not only for pastors to evangelize, but laymen as well, St Tikhon went on to say.<sup>3</sup>

Based on these few overbroad historical observations and egregious oversights, it is hard to take much of what follows very seriously. Unfortunately, a careful analysis is necessary. At this point we are forced to examine logical fallacies and invalid statements. Consider for example his critique of parish life, specifically his comments that the clerical garb of many parish priests is "indistinguishable from the clergy of other denominations" and that the choirs of these parishes have adopted "western style[s]" (of hymnody and dress presumably). Though factually correct, he states that this led to a "reaction" in the form of "ultraconservative" monasteries of a certain "Athonite influence." Tactically, with one fell swoop he has alienated both those devoted to a more liberal parish life and those who seek a more traditionalist form of worship. The fallacy lies herein: does he prefer parish clergymen and choirs who are dressed in a

---

<sup>3</sup> "St Tikhon's Last Sermon as Archbishop of the American Missionary Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Given on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, 1907," New York City, translated by Alex Maximov, <[www.monachos.net](http://www.monachos.net)>

“western style” or the monks with their cassocks who live in these “ultraconservative” monasteries?

Along this line of oxymoronic reasoning, he laments the “secularization of parish life,” which fails to “inspire young men.” This creates a “vacuum” which leads to middle aged family men stepping up to answer the priestly vocation. Even worse, this vacuum is taken up by convert priests who are essentially ignorant of Orthodox life and who are incapable of understanding the “cultural tradition” of certain parishes. The wrongness of this phenomenon is evident in the speaker’s eyes because these dreaded converts have swollen the ranks of the priesthood out of all proportion to the overall numbers of Orthodox Christians in general. The implication is that an egregious imbalance occurs and that because of their over-representation, and that we might as well as view them as anti-ethnic shock troops that are hostile to the ethnic groups they serve. As he states: these men “consciously oppose...[and are] gradually eradicating those *cultural elements* that have been the expression of the parishes that they serve.” (Emphasis added, for purposes that will soon become evident – *author*).

Having painted a rather bleak picture of Orthodox in America – both monastic as well as parochial – the speaker then turns to the Greek archdiocese. Again, in one paragraph, he makes two contradictory statements. On the one hand, this dark picture which was “painted with rough brushstrokes holds also true for the Archdiocese.” On the other hand, this same Archdiocese, which “was under the protection of the first See in the Orthodox world,” has “reached a level of maturity and excellence [which]...is the pride of the Church of Constantinople.” Indeed, in his very own words, it is the “most organized, well-structured, and successful presence of Orthodoxy today.”

The contradictions continue. Seemingly oblivious to his own words, or perhaps incapable of understanding his own arguments, he describes a pell-mell rush of the young to forget their "cultural patrimony and...language," but then states that this very same Hellenism is in fact "by definition alien to any form of nationalism or cultural chauvinism." In other words, young Greek-Americans disdain their Hellenic culture all the while not realizing that it is *not a form of culture*. This bears repeating: the Hellenic culture is not only not a culture, it is not a "form of nationalism(!)." This is Orwellian double-think at its best. Incidentally, this argument (such as it is) directly contradicts his earlier statements regarding convert priests who are disdainful of the "cultural elements" of the parishes which they serve. The illogic is further compounded by the lifting up of ethnic parish cultures for purposes of brow-beating their convert priests (while in the next breath disdaining their dependence on this same culture.) How to square this circle? One cannot. Presumably a safety valve exists: the Hellenic model of Byzantine governance (which is not cultural at all!).

These errors make one question not only his grasp of history, but his powers of observation of the present Orthodox scene in America. For example, as noted above, he stated that the Greek Archdiocese has been "under the protection" of the Ecumenical Patriarchate when the reality suggests the opposite. Second, as already noted, he states that this jurisdiction is the "most organized, well-structured and successful presence of Orthodoxy today." Each of these assessments is arguable at best. For example, the numbers frequently bandied about – 1.5 million adherents – are fantastic. If true, then every one of the 549 GOA parishes in the United States would have close to 3,000 parishioners. As the GOA does not have an open bookkeeping system, it is difficult to tell the true financial health

of the GOA. Certainly recent scandals involving pederasts in the priesthood and the resulting multimillion payouts have led many to speculate that the archdiocese is operating with significant deficits. Not to press the point, the Antiochian jurisdiction for example – though undergoing turmoil at present – has experienced the most explosive growth in American Orthodoxy, rising from 65 parishes in 1970 to over 240 today. Likewise the priesthood and the laity of the OCA has been able to right their ship after years of tumult by evicting the previous metropolitan's administration on their own volition without having to ask permission from foreign overlords.

At the risk of belaboring the point, the idea that the GOA is the most "successful presence" of Orthodoxy in America sounds rather triumphalistic, given what has transpired since the forced resignation of Archbishop Iakovos Coucouzis. In truth, anecdotal evidence throughout America suggests that the original critique of the speaker regarding the moribund spiritual state of churches best describes the vast majority of GOA parishes. Indeed, based on these comments, it is highly unlikely that the speaker is even aware of the internal life of the other Orthodox jurisdictions. After all, the Athonite "reaction" has occurred almost exclusively in the GOA; these monasteries conduct their many and lengthy services exclusively in Greek and the majority of the pilgrims who attend – often quite regularly – are of Greek origin.<sup>4</sup> Many in fact have stopped attending their original parishes, much to the disappointment of their priests.

This problem is so acute that most GOA bishops have placed a moratorium on the further creation any more monasteries, viewing

---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, a rising number of converts likewise attend services at these monasteries. The most famous pilgrim, Pittsburgh Steelers safety Troy Polumalu and his wife regularly attend Divine Liturgy at the Athonite monastery in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania.



them as injurious to the health of their own parishes. In my own personal correspondence with priests in the GOA, the picture I get is one of lay apathy, an indifferent approach to the sacraments, or an emphasis on culture at the expense of spirituality. Sometimes it is the more spiritually attuned laymen who proffer these criticisms against their parish priests and/or the parish elites, whom they accuse of worldliness, liberalism, and ecumenism.<sup>5</sup> At the Athonite monasteries however, the exact opposite is the case: serious priests-monks and devout laymen have found each other and the resultant spiritual vitality is clearly evident. Nor are the laymen simple observers of the services; many actively participate in their day-to-day operations and assist the monks and nuns in the construction and upkeep of these institutions.

Third, he castigates Holy Cross School of Theology because in his opinion, it is unable or unwilling to teach its students the Greek language. Supposedly, a regime exists at this seminary which views the teaching of Greek as retrograde, which is itself reflective of a broader "culture...of contempt" for the language. The sins of this seminary extend to beyond that of mere disdain for the Greek language; it appears that its graduates are unable of even the most rudimentary of priestly functions (presumably because they cannot speak Greek).

Fourth, he cleaves to the theologically discredited notion of the "diaspora" (although to his credit he does not hold to the arch definition of this abrasive term).

---

<sup>5</sup> As to comparisons between the jurisdictions, the emphasis on spiritual matters is often very stark. In most OCA parishes for example, Holy Communion will not be given unless the communicant has given a recent Confession. In ROCOR parishes, the premium upon recent Confession is even more stringent: many priests will not commune a parishioner unless they have confessed within the previous week. In my own personal experience with GOA parishes, Confession is moribund; often it is only the converts who seek this out.

Fifth, he distorts Metropolitan Philip Saliba's understanding of this term in a recent essay which he wrote concerning Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>6</sup> Although an analysis of Canon 28 is beyond the scope of this reply, it must be noted that the speaker utterly misrepresents this very same canon, ascribing to it an importance that was not evident when it was composed (being that it was never ratified).<sup>7</sup> In a blatant opposition to the plain text, he goes on to state that the prerogatives of the Byzantine Patriarch extend to all regions "which lie beyond the prescribed borders of the local Churches." In reality, Canon 28 *strictly limited* Constantinople's extra-territorial boundaries to "Pontus, Thrace, and Asia," that is to say modern-day Bulgaria, northeastern Greece, and Turkey. As to the "barbarians" over whom the Ecumenical Patriarchate had authority, this specifically meant those non-Roman peoples living within and possibly contiguous to these provinces, *not* the entire world as perfervid Phanariote propagandists constantly maintain.<sup>8</sup> To take this argument to its logical conclusion, we would be forced to believe that in order for the Ecumenical Patriarch to press his universalist claims, he and his votaries must insist that all Western Europeans and North and South Americans are barbarians.

---

<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Philip Saliba, "Canon 28 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council –Relevant or Irrelevant Today?" *The Word*, Mar 2000, pp 4-9, <[http://www.aoiusa.org/main/page.php?page\\_id=120](http://www.aoiusa.org/main/page.php?page_id=120)>

<sup>7</sup> It was only in the twentieth century with the accession of the controversial Meletios IV Metaxakis as Patriarch of Constantinople that the understanding of this canon was taken to mean those areas not already part of established churches. See for example "The Decline of the Patriarchate of Constantinople," an address given by St John Maximovitch, at the Second All-Diaspora Sobor of the Russian Church Abroad, held in Yugoslavia in 1938, <[http://www.aoiusa.org/main/page.php?page\\_id=122](http://www.aoiusa.org/main/page.php?page_id=122)>

<sup>8</sup> Constantinople's patronage of the metropolitanate of Kiev for example for the first 500 years of its existence was based on the fact that Grand Duke Vladimir specifically requested baptism for his people by Byzantine bishops and clergy. Political considerations were part of this as well in that he requested a Byzantine princess to be his bride.

### **III. Malice Aforethought**

The above opinions and assertions – though egregious – were merely a warm-up for what followed, which can best be described as a diatribe completely devoid of intellectual sobriety and Christian charity.

First, he accused Metropolitans Jonas [sic!] and Philip of “unfair and unjust criticism” leveled against the Ecumenical Patriarch. In doing so, he feels justified in characterizing their motives, if only for the “sake of historical truth and...moral conscience.” He goes on to criticize a paper that Jonah wrote while still an abbot. This paper, entitled “Episcopacy, Primacy, and the Mother Churches: A Monastic Perspective,”<sup>9</sup> was reasoned, well-researched, and sober in tone. Its dependence upon history, canon law, and theology is unimpeachable. Its main conclusion, that the primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was based on the existence of an extant Roman Empire is based on historical fact. It was only because a legal ruling by the Second Ecumenical Council for example, that Constantinople was elevated to patriarchal status. And because Constantinople was the imperial city, it made perfect political sense for it to displace Alexandria as second to Rome in the primatial sequence, even though Alexandria’s apostolic patrimony was well known. In fact, basing the hierarchical importance of cities based on their political and cultural significance was par for the course: Alexandria’s primacy before Antioch was not based on their respective founders (Sts. Mark and Peter, respectively), but upon their relative political, administrative, and cultural prominence. Simply put, this was done for political reasons, not theological ones. The apostolic succession of Byzantium was tenuous at best, as can be

---

<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Jonah, “Episcopacy, Primacy, and the Mother Churches: A Monastic Perspective,” *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Winter 2009, pp. 8-28 (editor’s note).

attested to by Eusebius, the first Christian historian, who listed hierarchical lists only for Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria.

Second, the speaker's criticism of +Jonah's assertion that there is "no common expression of unity that supersedes ethnic, linguistic, and cultural divisions," is rebutted by special pleading. He tells us that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has conjoined within its American eparchy "Greeks, Palestinians, Albanians, Ukrainians, and Carpatho-Russians." This is true so far as it goes, but so has the OCA, which has more Albanian churches, as well as tens of thousands of Bulgarian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Carpatho-Russians communicants. Indeed, the hierarchy of the OCA almost from its inception was made up of Carpatho-Russians, Russians, Albanians, Serbs, Romanians, and even converts. Today, one of its bishops (Alejo) is a Mexican national while the rest of the active hierarchs (save for the Bishop of Boston) are converts. Thus, one could easily turn the tables on the speaker and ask how many of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's bishops are of non-Greek origin? (Interestingly, he does not dwell on the Palestinian churches which were brought into the GOA by a back-channel deal between the Church of Jerusalem and the Phanar, and who have refused at present to accept incorporation in the GOA.<sup>10</sup>

The vituperation continues. Not content to merely impugn +Jonah's research, he castigates his church as being "the so-called OCA." This assertion is dismissive and incorrect – it is in fact legally incorporated as the "Orthodox Church in America." He then goes on to make a further gratuitous calumny, calling +Jonah "His Eminence" rather than "His Beatitude," and actually asserts that the OCA is "uncanonical." Despite its putative uncanonicity, it is only due to the

---

<sup>10</sup> George C Michalopoulos, "The Palestinian Vicariate: an Unnecessary Provocation?" <[www.ocl.org](http://www.ocl.org)>

“mercifulness” of the other Patriarchates that it barely enjoys communion at all. In point of fact, *all* autocephalous church accept the canonicity of the OCA, while only the Churches of Russia, Georgia, and Bulgaria accept its autocephaly. As far as its canonicity is concerned, +Bartholomew’s predecessor, celebrated the Divine Liturgy with (then) Metropolitan Methodius in 1990 at the OCA’s cathedral in Washington, DC. (It was at this venue that the late Ecumenical Patriarch lamented the ethnic fragmentation of Orthodoxy in America.) Further, he insinuates that +Jonah’s criticism of the imperial trappings of the modern episcopate implied that +Jonah refused the episcopal vestments upon his consecration. For the record, +Jonah did question whether it was appropriate for bishops to be dressed as emperors, placed on pedestals in the middle of churches, and exhorted to “live for a thousand years.” He was certainly not the first to do so. Our Lord himself had unkind words for pastors who “lord it over their fellows” (a warning that the Ecumenical Patriarch himself might want to ruminate over).

More shockingly, the speaker goes on to offer a most unfortunate analogy, likening the “primus” of the Church, to the “monarchy” of God the Father within the Trinity. This shows a parlous lack of theological and ecclesiological understanding (to say nothing of humility). The “monarchy” of God the Father does not imply superiority over subordinates, but primacy among equals. The correct analogy is not between the Ecumenical Patriarch and other patriarchs, but among all other bishops, all of whom are equal to him and all of whom share in the same episcopate—that of the Great High Priest. Indeed, the distorted understanding of the episcopate by the Phanariote propagandists is laid bare when we realize that the Church Fathers describe the bishop as standing in the midst of his church as an icon of God. As Abbott Jonah Pauffhausen wrote in this same essay, “there is no ordination beyond bishop.” This cannot be stressed

enough: there is no extraordinary charism attached to the primate of the national church (much less to the Ecumenical Patriarch) over and above that which inures to all bishops. To believe otherwise does serious injury to the very concept of the episcopate *in toto*.

As for his castigation of Metropolitan Philip's essay on Canon 28, I have already dealt with it earlier in this essay and little more can be added save this: this one lone canon has become the *sine qua non* of Phanariote supremacy, a veritable proof-text as it were. One could say that all other canons pale in comparison to this one extraneous addendum. Indeed, the Phanar's claims to supremacy can be abrogated when we substitute the word "Rome" for "Constantinople." In doing so, we elevate geography above the Gospel, and if we were true to our convictions (that is say that *locus* is the basis of our religion), we would have no choice but to seek reconciliation with Rome. On the other hand, if we realize that Rome was granted primacy over Jerusalem simply because it was the imperial city, then it makes sense for us to transfer our allegiance to Moscow, which was the Third Rome and the center of a world-wide empire in modern times. Following the logic of this progression, we would be forced to conclude that Washington, DC is now the capital of the hegemonic world power and that its archbishop should be considered *primus inter pares*.

The conclusion of this speech degenerates into absurdity. The speaker confusingly states that only the Ecumenical Patriarchate has the right to grant autocephaly, a contention that is clearly belied by history.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the illogic compounds itself: these daughter

---

<sup>11</sup> John H Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1991), pp 92-113.

churches are not really autocephalous since they have not received permission from Constantinople to “bestow autocephaly.” The litany of churches that he cites which have been granted autocephaly – Russia, Serbia, Romania, etc. – therefore are not really autocephalous. This picture of Constantinopolitan *uber*-autocephaly can only be sustained by a carefully constructed historical myth, made up of equal parts fabrication and omission. To believe that only the Ecumenical Patriarchate can grant autocephaly ignores the fact that it was the Third Ecumenical Council which granted autocephaly to the Church of Cyprus, cleaving it from the see of Antioch. As noted, it was another council which elevated the dioceses of Constantinople and Jerusalem to patriarchal status (and hence, autocephaly) and it was a local decision that allowed the see of Antioch to grant autocephaly to the Church of Iberia (Georgia) almost fifteen hundred years ago. If the autocephaly of Constantinople and Jerusalem was posterior to, and dependent upon, conciliar decisions, by what right then does Constantinople claim the sole prerogative to grant autocephaly? (Prior to this time, the diocese of Constantinople was a suffragan see of the archdiocese of Herakleia, Thrace).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The remainder of the speech is muddled with equal parts truth and falsehood as well. He states that the Ecumenical Patriarchate “never Hellenized, nor even attempted to Hellenize the nations to which it [evangelized].” There is nothing ambiguous about this assertion (although we may ask at this point, “why not?” since Hellenism is neither cultural nor an “expression of national chauvinism.”) An admirable sentiment, it is belied by a careful reading of history. For example, St Photius, while patriarch, disdained the Bulgarian church and mandated that its services be celebrated in Greek. It was only when the Bulgarian khan threatened to go to the

pope for resolution to this problem that Photius hastily backtracked.<sup>12</sup> Likewise the Greek language was used for the Nubian church during the entire time of its existence.<sup>13</sup> The Albanians did not possess a vernacular liturgy until the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> (The Greeks the not the only offenders: Romanian services were done exclusively in Slavonic up until the seventeenth century).<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the claim that the Ecumenical Patriarchate “neither had nor has territorial claims against sister Orthodox Churches,” is likewise problematic. At the beginning of this century for example, the Churches of Greece and Constantinople were at loggerheads over dioceses that are now within the boundaries of the Hellenic state but which remain under control of the Phanar. Although these territories were at one time not part of Greece, canonical good order mandates that they be should be given to the Church of Greece, which exercises political control over them. The problem of the Estonian, the Finnish, and the Polish churches came about precisely because of the dire straights of the Russian Church, which was prostrate before Soviet tyranny. The Czech and Slovak church likewise was created at the expense of the Serbian church. To be sure, these new churches were not aggrandized into the territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but it requires a special type of audacity to state that they were not created

---

<sup>12</sup> John Julius Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium*, (London: Penguin Books, 1997 ed.), pp 146-48.

<sup>13</sup> Aristeides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A.D* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1994; in collaboration with John Meyendorff), p 128.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Stokoe, *Orthodox Christians in North America 1794-1994* (OCPC: 1995, in collaboration with Leonid Kishkovsky), p 48.

<sup>15</sup> Sir Stephen Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1968), p 379. The passage dealing with the Slavonic language is oblique; Runciman is more concerned about Greek control of the Wallachian and Moldavian principalities during the seventeenth century. He states that the Greek princes encouraged the use of Romanian in the liturgies in order to weaken the control that the Serbs previously had enjoyed over the Romanians.



because of any "struggles" between Constantinople and its "sister" churches.

In the end, if we had to characterize the speaker's remarks, we would have to say that what began in a spirit of constructive criticism as regards to parish life, quickly degenerated into vapid generalizations, character assassination, and contempt for non-Greek jurisdictions and the OCA. In short, this speech was an example of stunning bad faith. To the extent that we can discern the speaker's intentions, we would have to say that it is the fervent belief of this speaker and others like him that the only font of rectitude and good order in the Orthodox Church is the Ecumenical Patriarchate. How else can we view a speech which glorifies the city limits of an extinct city and a hierarch who serves at the pleasure of a hostile secular-Islamist state at the expense of the Gospel of Christ? It is only by means of medievalist propaganda which itself is based on special pleading and appeals to ignorance or facts not germane to the present argument that we can listen to such diatribes.

This cannot be stressed enough: the see of Constantinople is a venerable and ancient one. Its bishop is rightly known as "first among equals." This is because of conciliar decisions which we Orthodox believe were guided by the Holy Spirit. It is equally clear that these titles and prerogatives were bestowed during a time that no longer exists. It is not my contention to remove these prerogatives but it is not possible for us to remove our own critical faculties either. We would have to do so to believe the words of this speaker, who appears to not understand the illogic and presumptuousness of his thesis. That his speech was based on equal parts historical amnesia, canonical distortion, and wishful thinking, may not be apparent to him, but judging by the firestorm that it generated, it is clearly obvious to the masses of American Orthodox who were offended by them.

The speaker will return someday to more congenial environs. American Orthodox Christians do not have this luxury. The society in which we live is rapidly becoming irreligious; one could say anti-Christian. Despite the attempted quashing of the first American archdiocese by the events of the Bolshevik revolution and the and the foundation of rival ethnic jurisdictions by schism and other irregularities, we no longer have the time or inclination to engage in pointless exegeses of defunct canons that were controversial even in their own day but which are certainly irrelevant now. Nor do we have the time to listen to the talking points of a foreign bureaucrat who presumes to know what is wrong with American Orthodoxy.

*About the author:* Mr. George C. Michalopoulos is the author with Deacon Ezra Ham of an up-to-date and complete history of the Orthodox Church in North America from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present (*The American Orthodox Church: A History of its Beginnings*). Mr. Michalopoulos has written essays and letters published on various web sites interested in Orthodox Christianity. He is a member of the Orthodox Church in America, a founder of Holy Apostles Orthodox Christian Mission, Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he was born and resides, and a member of the Board of Orthodox Christian Laity <[www.ocl.org](http://www.ocl.org)>. He is a pharmacist by training and profession. George and his wife Margaret are the parents of two sons.