Archim. Sophrony (Sakharov): Unity of the Church, an Image of the Holy Trinity (Orthodox triadology as a principle of ecclesiology)

This essay *was published in* ***Russian*** *and* ***French*** *in 1950.*

The English version is a republication from the website ***Orthodox Synaxis: https://orthodoxsynaxis.org/2019/04/20/archim-sophrony-sakharov-unity-of-the-church-an-image-of-the-holy-trinity/***

Nineteen centuries have passed since Saint Paul, as he walked through the city of Athens examining objects of worship, found an altar bearing this inscription: “to the unknown God (Agnosto Theo)” (Acts 17:23).

It is clear that this altar was erected by the best representatives of human thought, by sages who had reached the limits of knowledge, limits that remain unsurpassable even to our own day for man’s natural understanding—for God is unknowable for logical thought. True knowledge of the true God comes from Revelation.

In the divine economy of our salvation, the Church marks certain events as being essential by commemorating them with Feasts. They follow each other chronologically: Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany (in the Byzantine rite, this feast is called the Baptism of Christ), Transfiguration, the Passion, the Resurrection, Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Spirit. In God’s revelatory designs, each of these events is tied to the others in an organic and indissoluble manner, but the day of Pentecost, the day when the descent of the Holy Spirit is celebrated, has a particular place because it marks the fulfillment of the Revelation of the Great God Almighty, the Creator of all things.

God knows no envy, pride or ambition. The Spirit of God follows man humbly and patiently on all the paths of life in order to make Himself known to him and by this to even join him to His divine eternity (cf. Acts 10:35). This is why in every age man could, to a certain degree, attain knowledge of the true God. Apart from the Incarnation of the Word and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, however, perfect knowledge of God was impossible. Apart from Christ, who has come in the flesh, no spiritual, philosophical or mystical experience allows man to know the Divine Being as absolute Objectivity, an unknowable, in Three Subjects equally absolute and unknowable; in other words: the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity.

The nature of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God the Creator, possesses the faculty of a certain conjecture about the Divine Being. But this conjecture does not lead to true knowledge of the divine mystery, as all historical experience shows us, and this is why it is necessary for God Himself to reveal to man, to the degree accessible to his understanding, the image of His existence.

We must not forget that the Revelation of the New Testament was preceded by that of the Old. When Christians immerse themselves in the contemplation of biblical Revelation, they already hear in the first chapters of Genesis familiar words about the One God who is, at the same time, multiple: “God says: let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” And again, “God says: behold, man has become like one of Us” (Genesis 1:26, 3:22). The Psalms and the Prophets show us that the Old Testament knew of God’s Word (Λόγος) and Spirit (Πνεῦμα). “The heavens were created by the word (Λόγος) of God and all their host by the breath (Πνεῦμα) of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6, and others). But we do not find there knowledge of the Word and Spirit as Hypostases, as Person-Subjects. They are seen there as energies. The humankind of the Holy Testament desperately debated the notion of the One God, understood not within the framework of Christian monotheism, but within that of non-Christian henotheism (that is to say, God with one sole hypostasis). One cold even wonder if it was not an account of the narrowness of the framework imposed by henotheism that the Jews of the Old Testament felt so attracted to to polytheism. But that path being forbidden to them by the Law and the Prophets, they languished awaiting the promised Messiah-Emmanuel, Who would reveal to them the entire truth about God (John 4:25).

If we examine the other part of humankind before Christ, those who lived apart from the Revelation of the Old Testament, we will see, alongside countless mistakes, remarkable approximations of knowledge of the truth. This experience of a certain natural knowledge of God is very precious for us. It shows us the limits of what is naturally accessible. Each time that man wants to place reason at the head of his spiritual life, in other words, each time that he tries to know eternal Truth through the effort of his intellect, he inevitably falls into a pantheistic conception of Being. This, it seems to us, is due to the fact that the intellect is impersonal in the functions proper to it. Left to itself and taken as the superior form of the human faculties, it necessarily tends toward conflict with the personal principle in Being in general. But when man notices that the personal principle is the basis of every rational essence, he recognizes the inadequacy of personality, of the Ego, taken in isolation and naturally turns toward polytheistic pluralism.

It is strange to note that the impersonal monism of pantheists and even pagan pluralism belong, to a certain degree, to human thought even into our own day.

The pantheistic understanding of Being is superior to pagan polytheism inasmuch as it takes account of

the primordial unity of Being. The advantage of pagan pluralism, at its best, consists of true knowledge of the person as a profound and ontological principle all rational being and of understanding it as one of the Energies, one of the manifestations of this principle.

Thus the experience of the pre-Christian world, whether or not it participated in the Revelation of the Old Testament, clearly teaches us that man gets lost in his misunderstandings, unable to find a way out and to arrive at true knowledge of God. This way out and this knowledge are given to humankind by the divine Revelation in Jesus Christ and by the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

But what is the knowledge of the mystery of the Divine Being that were were given by this Revelation? Can one express it in words and if that is possible, where are these words? It is the Church of Christ Who keeps them, She Who teaches us that the true God is the one God in three Persons. She speaks to us of the divine existence as an inseparable Tri-Unity without confusion; as the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity. Here we would like to cite an exposition of that teaching known under the name “the Creed-Confession of our Father among the Saints Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria.”[1]

“Whosoever seeks salvation must first of all confess the catholic faith. There is no doubt that if one does not hold this faith in its fullness and purity, one cannot avoid perishing for eternity. Here is this Catholic faith: We worship the one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without confusing the Hypostases and without dividing the Substance. For one is the Hypostasis of the Father, another That of the Son, and another That of the Holy Spirit. But the Divinity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is One, Their Glory is equal and their Majesty coeternal. Such is the Father, such also is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the father, uncreated the Son and uncreated the Holy Spirit. Incomprehensible is the Father, Incomprehensible is the Son and incomprehensible the Holy Sprit. Eternal is the Father, eternal the Son, eternal the Holy Spirit: however, there are not three eternal things, but One eternal. Likewise, there are not three uncreated and incomprehensible things, but One alone is uncreated and incomprehensible. Likewise: almighty (Pantocrator) is the Father, almighty the Son and almighty the Holy Spirit: however, there are not three almighty things, but One Almighty. Thus, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless there are not three gods, but One sole God. Likewise: the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord and the Holy Spirit is Lord; however, there are not three lords, but One Lord; Since we have been brought by Christian truth to confess each of the Hypostases as God and Lord; and at the same time catholic piety forbids us from naming three gods and three lords. The Father was not created, made or begotten by anybody. The Son is from the Father, still not created or made, but begotten. The Holy Spirit was not created or made by the Father, but proceeds from Him. One alone is Father and not three fathers. One alone is Son and not three sons. One alone is Holy Spirit and not three holy spirits. And in this Holy Trinity none is first or last. None is greater or less great. But the three Hypostases are whole, coeternal to Each Other and equal. Thus it follows from all that has been said that the Trinity is worshipped in Unity and Unity in Trinity. He who seeks his salvation, let him

think in this way about the Holy Trinity."

This creed of Saint Athanasius is usually found in the Psalter. It is followed by the "exposition of the faith of Saint Maximus, questions and brief responses." Here is how he confesses the Holy Trinity:

"If you want to know what God is and how it is fitting to worship Him, understand and comprehend and truly know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. One is holy, one desire, one will, one wisdom and one power. One is not before all ages while Another is within the ages; but the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are together. The Son is in the Father the the Spirit is in the Son, together one Nature and one Godhead. This Godhead is divided in Three in the Hypostases, but It is one in substance. This is why, when invoking the Father, in glorifying the Son and in confessing the Holy Spirit, we call upon God, since the divine nature is common to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. But the Names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not names common to all the Persons, but particular to each of the Hypostases. For the Father is not called Son, the Son is not called Father, and the Holy Spirit is not called Father or Son, but God is always called Trinity. I say three Hypostases, which is to say three Persons, but one image. We do not say: three substances in three Persons; nor three natures, nor three gods as the disciples of the accursed Arius say. But we confess one God, one substance, one nature in Three Hypostases. We do not confess one sole hypostasis like the accursed Sabellians: but we confess, pray to, and worship Three Hypostases, Three Persons in one image and in one sole Godhead."

This Revelation of the Triune God is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, joy and light for every believer. It flows out onto all manifestations of human life. It resolves all the problems and misunderstandings of the mind and the heart. It leads us into the infinite spaces of eternal life. However, when our intellect is detached from our heart, which is filled by the grace of faith, and remains alone before Revelation with the laws proper to reasoning, this Revelation presents itself to it as a series of insoluble problems.

It is impossible for us to imagine a personal Being Who is perfect Life and eternally realized, Life which excludes any shadow of a process. In other words, a Being in Whose life self-awareness does not precede the act of perfect self-determination and in Which this self-determination is not anterior to the absolute fullness of self-awareness.

It is impossible for us to conceive of a personal Being Who, being absolutely free in its self-determination and, consequently, not limited by any predestination whatsoever, does not exclude an absolute objectivity of its nature and its essence. Our intellect does not comprehend how nature or existence, which is absolute and objective reality, does not in any way precede and determine the absolute perfection of the self-determination of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Such a personal Being appears unthinkable for us, one Who, being absolutely unique and simple, is at the same time triune, such that each of the Three is an absolute Subject Who bears in Himself all the fullness of Divine Being; that is to say, Who is perfect and unique God, dynamically equal to the whole Tri-Unity.

Our thought cannot access the existence of a Triune Being in Whom the Begetter does not precede the Begotten, nor Him Who proceeds; where begetting and procession in no way limit the absolute freedom of the personal self-determination of the Begotten and of the One Who proceeds.

The Being in Which the Three Persons are distinguished from the one Essence, this Essence which is distinguished from the energies, and Who at the same time absolutely simple and excludes all complexity, This Being is beyond our understanding.

How can this Being, Who encloses within Himself a series of acts, such that the begetting of the Son, the procession of the Holy Spirit, acts of self-determination and self-knowledge, be at the same time an absolutely simple act, outside of any process and any duration? This is also beyond our understanding.

We cannot imagine a Being whose ontological principle, the Father, precedes neither the begotten Son nor the proceeding Spirit and is not ontologically superior to either, to the point that it is possible to speak of Their coeternity and Their absolute equality in honor, power and Divinity or, to put it better, of Their unity in power, in honor and in Divinity; of their one glory, Their one energy, Their one will—and all this to such a point that dogma “forbids” any thought of hierarchical structure or subordination within the Holy Trinity. “And in this Holy Trinity none is first or last, none is greater or less great, but the Three Hypostases are whole, coeternal and equal to Each Other.”

The Church teaches us that God is a Being who has His cause in Himself and Who, apart from Himself, has no being that is independent and parallel to Him. She speaks to us of the perfect, living God Who is, consequently, pure act. But when our understanding stops before this Being, He appears as a pure fact on account of His primordial and absolute perfection.

Confronted with this doctrine of the Church, our intellect is filled with astonishment and silence. She does not adapt herself to the narrow frameworks of our reasoning. And when we examine what the Church teaches about the Incarnation of One of the Three—the Son, the Logos—several even more complex problems arise before us. We cannot conceive how the Infinite takes a beginning, how the Uncreated takes the form of a created existence. How can the only Son be perfect God and perfect Man? How does the one Hypostasis of the One Who became incarnate indissolubly and distinctly unite two natures, two wills, two actions, divine and human? We cannot conceive of dogma of the Church which speaks to us of the one nature, the one will, the one action of the Holy Trinity and at the same time

of the two natures, two actions two wills united in One of the Three.

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These are not the only problems presented to our intellect when it encounters the doctrine of the Church. Some will always present themselves and they will always appear unsolvable. And if, despite Revelation, the divine Being remains for us inconceivable, unfathomable, invisible, undefinable, unspeakable, then what is the new life and the new knowledge that the dogma of the Church brings to us regarding the Holy Trinity? We will pose another question here: When it happens that we fall on a doctrine of a reality not corresponding to the concepts of our intellect, which always reasons according to its own laws, is this contradiction a sufficient reason to consider this doctrine false? The answer to this question is formal: this reason is not sufficient. The history of human culture gives us multiple examples. Countless facts that today belong to the domain of empirical science until very recently still appeared impossible to all scientific minds. Let us imagine that during the last century someone would have delved by intuition into the structure of matter. This intuition would have revealed to him the life of the atom and he would have developed modern theories without always being able to demonstrate them experimentally. Of course, he would have been considered a madman or at least a fantasist or dreamer.

On the other hand, as soon as science has empirical proof of a phenomenon, it becomes foolish to want to prove, through logical conclusions, the non-existence or impossibility of that phenomenon. And now in the domain of science we find ourselves before the fact of its empirically-established existence and our reason can no longer resist it and so necessarily comes to terms with this fact. It is the same with the Revelation given to the Church which speaks to us of a determined fact — the Divine Being. When our reason follows this fact, it arrives to a certain degree at knowledge of what was previously unknown and inconceivable.

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The “Creed” cited above expounds extremely concisely on the fulness of the knowledge of the Divine Being accessible to man. This confession, which is the dogma of the Church, has no need of logical proofs. To the contrary, she makes us see the supreme fact of the Being Who acts as the foundation of all, of our life and of our knowledge, which is to say of our whole being, which is simple and unique in its wholeness. In order to arrive at this knowledge, there is no other path but the one shown by the Church. The sciences taught in schools demand of the students learning them submission to the methods and instructions of their teachers. The Church has Her own science, which is knowledge of God. She has her path, her method, which leads to this knowledge. Those desiring to reach it must follow this path traced by the Church, which is that of faith and obedience to Christ’s commandments.

God is Love and cannot be known and contemplated except through love and in love. This is why

Christ's commandments, which lead to knowledge and contemplation of God, are also commandments of love. The mystery of the Trinity is only imperfectly conceivable, as it surpasses the limits of our understanding and the powers of our created being. But although it is inconceivable and hidden, it reveals itself to us ceaselessly in an existential manner, through faith and through life in faith, thus becoming an inexhaustible source of eternal life. Faith delves into depths inaccessible to the intellect; it calls us to knowledge and possession of divine mysteries not through logical reasoning, but through a life in Christ's divine commandments. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Along this path of Christ's words, God comes in front of man and makes His abode with him (Jean 14:23), by giving him true knowledge of Himself. It is at that point that what appeared inconceivable becomes light that enlightens our ignorance and our errors and reveals them to us as consequences of our sin and our fall. At that point there appears to us fulness without limits, wisdom, beauty, light and the truth of Divine Life, which is Love.

Let us nevertheless refrain from going too far in the quest for a verbal definition of the mysterious principle of this attribute of Divine Life, which is at the basis of the unity that makes the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity only one Being. Our mind should stop at a certain limit so that our confession of faith will not be falsified by rationalizing dogma. However, since Revelation teaches us that God is Love and our Savior has given us the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, for these reasons we can conceive of the essence of the Divine Being as Love. This does not mean that love, as an essence, preceded the Three Persons, that the essence is anterior to the Persons, who in that case would only be the manifestations of that Essence. No, Love is the Essence, the very Nature of the Godhead, but in the sense of an absolute liberty of self-determination of the Three Persons. This self-determination is not, however, a "psychological" and subjective state of the Hypostases, but a reality, an objectively existing nature. This is why the dogma of the Church distinguishes between the Persons and the Essence in the Divine Being.

Man is preceded in his existence by another existence. For him, this is an established an incontestable fact that appears to limit his self-determination from the outside. Man manifests his qualities over the course of his development, going through a certain process, an evolution. This process and this evolution are totally absent in the Divine Being. We must always remember this when we think of God, so as not to fall into the error of anthropomorphism. Even though man is created in God's image, he nevertheless inverses the hierarchy of life when he seeks to attribute to God notions inspired by his knowledge of himself. At that point he starts to create God in his own image and likeness. The contrary path is that of the Church. We do not create God in our own image, but rather, by following Christ's commandments, we discover within ourselves the attributes of our nature which is created in God's image.

Two commandments of Christ lead man to deification: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31). Of these two commandments, it is the second that reveals to us more of the mystery of the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity. Here's why.

The first commandment tells us, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." It did not say, "You shall love your God as yourself." That would be pantheism. This commandment speaks to us of a degree of love. We must know God as love, but at the same time it shows us the limit between man and God. It causes us to participate in the divine life, but it does not cause the difference of nature (ἑτερούσιον) to disappear.

The second commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," not only teaches us the measure or the degree of love, but by the expression "as yourself" it rather shows us a profound ontological community of all our pan-human existence, of our consubstantiality (to homoousion). Realized in life, this commandment leads us to the fact that all humanity is nothing but one man.[2]

Love has the result of transposing the existence of the person who loves into that of the beloved. He who loves starts to live in the beloved. The person, the Ego, can thus be penetrated by Love. The absolute perfection of love in the Trinity reveals the perfect interpenetration of the Three Persons, to such a point that they are only one will, only one action, only one glory, only one power, only one Divinity, only one Essence. This is why each Person-Hypostasis is the bearer of the whole fullness of the Godhead and is dynamically equal to the unity of the Three.

It is in the image of this love that the keeping of the second commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," reestablishes the consubstantiality of the human race, which was broken by sin, and leads to the fullness of the human being becoming the possession of each person. Realized in its final perfection, this commandment reveals that man is one, one in his essence and multiple in his hypostases. Thus man, in the image of the Holy Trinity, is a consubstantial and catholic being. When love is realized in all its fullness, each hypostasis, by virtue of its abiding in the fullness of catholic unity, represents the fulfillment of the human being and is dynamically equal to all humanity, to the One Universal Man, in the image of the Perfect Man, Christ who contains within Himself all Man.

Thus, along the path of keeping Christ's commandments, which is the path of the Church, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed. This mystery is revealed in an existential, vital manner that is neither abstract nor rational. There is no other way to knowledge of the divine mysteries.

Before this Revelation of the Church, words of profound astonishment have always rung out and shall ring out until the end of the ages: "Strange words, strange doctrines, strange dogmas of the Holy Trinity"

(the Matins of Pentecost).

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The fullness of dogmatic life in the Church is never interrupted, never diminished. Nevertheless, various historical periods bring out certain aspects of Her teaching which always remain one overall, emphasizing these aspects in order to avoid the danger of diminishing the wholeness of the truth by an error of detail. In our own day, a great danger threatens the dogma concerning the Church within the Orthodox Church herself. The idea of the Church, of this “Kingdom which is not of this world”, the Kingdom of the Heavenly King, of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, of this new life, established on earth by the incarnate Word, is in danger of being once more distorted, which may cause immense harm to the work of our salvation. It is thus natural that our attention be concentrated on this issue.

Periods similar to our own place great responsibilities upon each of us, for according to the teaching of the Church, perfectly expressed in the Encyclical of the Patriarchs of the East in 1848, it does not belong only to the hierarchy to protect the truth, but rather this task is entrusted to the Church in Her fullness.[3]

Judging it impossible to remove from us the responsibility that has been laid upon us, as a son of the Church, although we are unworthy, we make a fervent appeal to all Orthodox Christians to examine the danger that threatens them in all its profundity so that, aided by the grace of God, we may remove this danger and preserve the truth inherited from our Holy Fathers in all its purity. We call upon our brothers to consider with full consciousness these dogmatic questions that are of cardinal importance in the work of our salvation.

It is always painful to enter into debates where people accuse each other of having abandoned the truth, but that was the environment in which the Fathers lived in the period that we call the Church’s golden age, that of the holy Ecumenical Councils. Let us recall the history of the Fathers who fought for Orthodoxy, ready not only to endure all suffering, but also to suffer death. Who does not remember Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, who spend the greater part of his life in incessant struggles, in exile and misery, all for just one iota—“homoousios” against the “homoiousios” of the Arians. We know the example of Saint Bail, who was ready to die for this same iota. Let us remember Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Patriarch Photius, Simeon the New Theologian, Mark of Ephesus, Gregory Palamas, as well as other Fathers whose names are great before God, albeit little known to men. They all suffered without end and accepted martyrdom of death for the true faith. In the writings of several eminent Russian theologians such as Khomiakov, Bolotov, Nesmelov and others, the exceptional importance of the dogmatic element for our salvation has been forcefully demonstrated. May we all have the fire with which Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov burned when he wrote, “The world in no way enticed me. I remained cold and indifferent to it as though it were devoid of any charms, as though it didn’t exist at all! My spirit was absorbed with learning and at the same time it burned with the desire to

learn where the true faith was hidden, where the true teaching was to be found, free from all dogmatic and moral error." (The edition of 1885, pp. 633-35. See also The Works of Bishop I. Brianchaninov, vol. I, 1886, Biography, p. 13).

So great was the fervor of our fathers for dogmatic questions because they were conscient of their importance not only for their own salvation, but also for the salvation of the whole world, for the very existence of the true Church on earth.

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We have the task of showing in a short exposition that the catholic principle of the Orthodox Church is a reality in the image of the Holy consubstantial and indivisible Trintiy.

The Church has the goal of introducing her members into the domain of Divine Life and, consequently, it is inevitable that her historical reality reflections the image of that Life. The dogma of the Church speaks to us of an inconceivable perfection of Divine, Triune, Catholic Life. This dogma affirms the equality in divinity, in kingship, in sovereignty or, more synthetically, the equality in the absolute of the Three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity. "Nothing (in It) is first or last. Nothing is greater or less great." In the interior of trinitarian life, there is no hint of submission, of subordination. The begetting of the Son, the procession of the Holy Spirit, all while demonstrating one sole principle in the Holy Trinity, nevertheless do not cause the Son or the Holy Spirit to be diminished before the Father. "But the Three Hypostases are coeternal and equal among Themselves."

The Church is called to reveal to us the image of this Triune Being. If someone asks us, "What are the forms or the historical principles that reveal this image to us?" We could answer: the principle of catholicity and that of autocephaly.[4] Translating these terms onto another plane, we can say: the principle of love and of equality, that of freedom and of consubstantiality. And again, by connecting these concepts we will have: in the freedom of catholic charity and in the equality of consubstantiality.

Is it necessary to insist on the gap that exists between the ideal to which we are called and the historical reality of the Church? Our distance from this ideal is so great that we can neither feel nor comprehend it. There is no love in us and for this reason we disregard the profundity of our consubstantial equality and unity. We have lost our love and out of this result our divisions and our tendencies to domination.

We have lost love and with it the guidance of the Divine Light and we walk in the shadows of "dusky pride" and in the death of hatred. It is to us that Christ said, "you are the light of the world" and we have become a scandal to all.

We said above that a great danger is making itself felt within Orthodoxy itself, threatening to disfigure

the teaching about the nature of the Church and, consequently, Her entire life, since dogmatic consciousness is organically tied to the entirety of spiritual life. It is impossible to change the least thing in our dogmatic understanding without changing to the same degree the image of our spiritual existence.

And, conversely, a deformation in the inner life will lead to a deformation of dogmatic consciousness. The loss of dogmatic truth will have as an inevitable consequence the impossibility of attaining true knowledge of God, the fullness of which the Church possesses. The Church's dogmatic confession forms an indivisible organic whole and it is not permitted to treat the different parts of this confession separately. One deformed detail will influence the whole. If the teaching on the nature of the Church is disfigured, and as a consequence, as we have already said, also the image of Her existence, how can She serve Her children on the path towards the truth?

One may ask us, "In what is this deformation currently manifesting itself?" We answer: in the neo-papism of Constantinople which is tending to progress rapidly from theoretical form to practical realization.

Papist tendencies in general are only natural to our sinful world. They manifest themselves in the East as in the West, in Byzantium as in Rome. But until now God has protected the Eastern Church and these tendencies died out without disturbing the profound peace of the Church. We do not want to pause here over the the reasons that have caused a new growth in these tendencies, limiting ourselves to examine only the dogmatic basis of this question in order to show that papism, whether of First, Second or Third Rome or of any important or unimportant city is foreign to the very nature of Christ's Church.

The dogma about the Church is tightly bound to that of the Trinity and the Incarnation. That is to say, to Triadology and Christology. The articles of the Rev Fr Kovalevsky, of Mr Lossky and also of Hieromonk Silvanus, which appeared in Issue I of our Messenger deal with the Christological aspect of the dogma about the Church. This is why here we shall only touch upon the tradological aspect of this teaching.

This dogma teaches us that the perfect Unity of the Divine Love of the Three Persons excludes any domination by One of Them. Each time that Christian thought slid towards rationalism, it became unable to contemplate this aspect of the divine nature. Rationalism, which always tends toward logical monism, cannot avoid imagining either a hierarchical structure within the Holy Trinity by affirming the superiority of the First Person as an ontological principle or the confusion of the Three Persons, thining of them as "modes" of manifestation of the One Essence of the Godhead. Theology calls the first deformation "subordinationism" and the second "modalism". The principle of the papacy introduces subordinationism into the inside of the Church. As only this principle interests us here, we will set aside modalism and limit our analysis to the first triadological deformation.

The forms of subordinationism vary. Sometimes people saw within the Trinity an ontological subordination, independent of the relationship between God and His creation. This “ontological” subordinationism was held by Origen. Sometimes people attributed to the First and Second Persons a diminished importance and power with regard to the creation of the world and the economy of our salvation. Tertullian and Arius are examples of this “cosmological” or “economic” subordinationism. Over the course of its development, ontological subordinationism naturally acquired an economic aspect and vice-versa—economic and cosmological subordinationism took on an ontological aspect, unless the Hypostases were treated as modes of manifestation of God in the world.

The Church categorically rejects every form of subordinationism. She professes her faith in the Holy Trinity in these terms: “None is greater, none is less great (in the Trinity), but rather the Three Hypostases are whole, coeternal with Each Other and equal.”

Triadological subordinationism, transposed onto the structure of the Church, takes the form of papism, which reflects one or another form of this false doctrine. Thus in ecclesiology Roman Papism corresponds to the ontological aspect of Arius’ subordinationism, since it give the Bishop of Rome a place that separates him from the rest of the body of the Church, raising him to a height that makes him not simply great but of another nature (τὸ ἑτερούσιον). We must make clear that we are not applying this parallel to the origin of Roman Papism, but to its current form established by the Vatican Council in 1870. Its origin is nothing but a survival from the pagan Roman Empire. Its dogmatic conception was later influenced by the theology of the “filioque”, which leads to a specific form of christocentrism. There then appeared a rupture between God and the world: Christ became transcendent to the world and the Bishop of Rome took His place in the earthly Church; the Holy Spirit, in practice, lost His absolute hypostatic equality to the Father and the Son, becoming nothing but a power of Christ, entrusted to the authority and judgment of the Bishop of Rome.

All these historical processes are of an extreme complexity. They are the result of the reciprocal action of countless influences, conditions and wills. In speaking here schematically about Roman papism, we limit ourselves to only a dogmatic summary.

The modern papacy of Constantinople is only in its embryonic phase. For the last 20 or 30 years, it has appeared to seek ground. Its current development is very rapid, in contrast to the slow development over centuries of Roman papism, which only attained its final phase in 1870. In fact, the ideology of Constantinople’s papism has varied several times in only a little time and it is still difficult to define.

The Russian adepts of this papism are almost all found in France. Until 1948, we had not seen among them any canonically or theologically-founded idea. As they themselves admitted, they “were looking” above all “for a canonical basis” so as not to be outside the Body of the Universal Orthodox Church after

their separation from the Mother-Church of Russia. With this goal, they began by recognizing a privilege of jurisdictional right of the Patriarch of Constantinople inasmuch as he is “Ecumenical”. Later, they attributed to the See of Constantinople primacy and the right of Supreme Appeal in the Universal Church, forgetting the struggle that the latter had waged for centuries against Rome’s pretentions to this right; forgetting that these pretentions were precisely the cause of the definitive Great Schism in the Church in 1054 and that at the Council of Florence Rome sought above all from the East recognition of this supreme arbitration in the Universal Church. They also forgot the multiple Canons of the Ecumenical and Local Councils which refused to attribute these rights to any given local Church, canons that even the Church of Constantinople understood very well when she was firmly insisting on the Orthodox position in order to combat Rome’s pretentions.

Until 1946, this group, loyal to Metropolitan Evlogy, considered its dependence on Constantinople as provisional. Starting from that date, they believed “to have found canonical truth” by submitting to her definitively. At the same time, they sought not only a canonical basis, but also a theological foundation for their position. Adopting the principle of “development”,[5] particular to the theology of Roman Catholics, they attributed to Constantinople exclusive authority over the Orthodox “diaspora” in the entire world, denying other Autocephalous Churches this same right with regard to their dispersed children. Unable to find for this assertion any canonical basis or any example in the age-old practice of the Church, they sought, following Rome’s example, to refer to the orders of “God Himself”. Here is what they say:

“In order to maintain and consolidate the Church’s unity, God (?) imposes upon us the obligation to keep not only the unity of the faith and the sacraments, not only the unity of love, but also the indissoluble unity of the holy hierarchy and of the administration of the Church as much in the whole world as in every place where the Church exists. This is why since apostolic times (?) the Holy Church (?) our, to put it better, God Himself (?) has established a superior Bishop first in the entirety of the Catholic Church and in each place or each city one sole bishop, terrestrial vicar of His Son, with a single clergy depending on him and in unanimous accord with the entire Orthodox people, even if this people is represented by members of a different origin and languages. The Holy Church does not know any other structure” (Messenger of the Russian Church in Western Europe no. 21, 1949, p. 2, “Declaration of the Diocesan Assembly”).[6]

Before continuing the exposition of the “development” of the canonical and ecclesiological idea that we are examining, we propose to compare the text cited above to another text that seems to us to be characteristic of Roman Catholic doctrine. Here, for example, is what the Catholic theologican the Rev Fr S. Tyshkevich says on this topic in his “Treatise on the Church” (Paris, 1931, in Russian, pp. 232 and 233):[7]

“The Bishop of Rome possess a jurisdiction that is 1) universal: it includes all questions of the faith and the administration of all the parts of the Church and other things; 2) supreme: the Bishops of all the Churches, even those far away, appeal to the pope. He even judges the Patriarchs. Without the pope’s approval, an Orthodox Council is not possible; 3) ordinary: it includes all matters requiring an intervention from the Supreme Authority, and not only in rare and exceptional cases; 4) direct: that is to ay that it extends not only to every Episcopacy, but, in case of need, directly to all the servants of the Church and to all laypeople; 5) established by God and conferred by Christ the Head and by the Holy Spirit and not by the Episcopacy or by “the people of the faithful” (emphasis by the author, the Rev Fr Tyshkevich).

The first text cited, that of the “Declaration of the Diocesan Assembly”, ends with these words: “Those who teach otherwise do not do so in the Spirit of God, but rather they sow discord and enmity.” These words prove the degree to which the authors of this Declaration are convinced “of having found the truth.” The Rev Fr Alexander Schmemann writes in his precis “The Church and Her Structure” in response to the Rev Fr Michel Polsky:

“The partisans of the ideas of the Rev Fr Posky probably do not miss an occasion, not without irony, of the ‘tortuous path’ and the ‘jurisdictional variations’ of our Diocese. And indeed, we have no pretense of possessing infallibility (?) like the Rev Fr Polsky. In fact, our Diocese has more than once suffered commotions and acute crises. But we believe that in seeking each time the right path prudently in communion with the whole ecclesiastical organism, we have demonstrated a true spirit of the Church, more than “the Synod of the Russian Church Abroad”[8] with tis prideful attitude of infallibility. Errors and failures are always possible in the life of the Church. History abounds in examples to prove it… In the tragic conditions of the life of the Russian emigration, the search for the right path sometimes presented great difficulties. Whatever the motives were that caused Metropolitan Evlogy to turn to Constantinople, whatever his own understanding of this step that he took, it is not this subjective and psychological aspect that counts. What is truly important is the objective significance of this measure in the eyes of the Church. As time passes, we we appreciate more and more to what degree this measure was in line with the truth of the Church. It has definitively broken the vicious cycle of subjective and fortuitous attitudes toward the problem of the Church’s structure: a firm canonical basis was found” (p. 22. Emphasis by the author, the Rev Fr Schmemann).

Other representatives of that group share this perspective. We read in issue 21 of the Messenger “Tserkovny Vestnik” among the publications of the materials of the Diocesan Assembly:

“The unity of the Church will not be reestablished so long as we have not heard from atop the Ecumenical See the voice of the first hierarch and supreme leader[9] of the whole Orthodox Church, whose authority is formal for us, as for the Synod of Munich” (p. 7).[10]

“The Universal Church is not presided over solely by the authority of the Ecumenical Councils; those only meet in extreme cases. She is presided over permanently by the person of the supreme hierarch of the Orthodox Church. This place belonged to Rome inasmuch as it had not fallen into the Catholic heresy.[11] From that moment on, the Patriarch of Constantinople took his place” (p. 16).

All these citations, as well as all the expositions of the Rev Fr Schmemann, indicated above, and of other representatives of this tendency show us clearly how they arrived at such conclusions. Having correctly understood the canonical principle of local unity by the primacy of the authority of a head-bishop, they did not notice that this personal primacy does not extend beyond the episcopal eparchy (see Apostolic Canon 34) and, faithful to their principle of “development”, they took it “to the end”[12] in giving it universal significance.[13] This is yet another similarity to Roman Catholicism.

“In the Work of Christ and in His Holy Church, Which is the fruit of this Work, there is nothing unfinished, nothing incomplete, nothing unilateral. Everything in her is developed “to the end.” Christ’s work knows no gaps, no ruptures, no stops. Thus, the logical ascension of the degrees of the ecclesiastical hierarchy do not stop at the rank of Bishop or of Patriarch, but rather goes toward the papism that is its natural conclusion, required by the Church’s theandric nature. The Church’s hierarchy of Priests and Bishops is unified “to the end.” It cannot be deprived of this essential rank, without which it could not be one hierarchy, but would rather only be a collection of several hierarchies” (Tyshkevich, op. cit. pp. 280-281).

Let us once more pause over what has been said above. We have already demonstrated that each time that Christian thought tended toward theological rationalism, it came to be incapable of contemplating the Divine Life. It then bends under the influence of logical monism, which is proper to rationalism, either toward subordinationism in the sense of the superiority of the First Person of the Holy Trinity as ontological principle to toward the Sabellian understanding of that considers the Three Persons as modes of manifestation of one sole Divine Essence. This inevitable tendency of rationalism toward logical monism has produced many heresies. In endeavoring to push “the logical ascension” “to the end”, theological rationalism falls into absurdity. Its difficulty consists of the fact that it very rightly sees one or the other aspect of the truth.

The earthly Church is not made up of members who have all attained perfection. Her members are not all filled with the fullness of Her teaching and Her life, but they are born, grow and develop though teaching. It is thus inevitable that there are teachers and students, spiritual fathers and children. Consequently, the existence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy is necessary. Taking this necessity into account, the Roman Church pressed the hierarchical principle “to the end”, having invested one sole Bishop, separating him from the whole of the Church, and attributing to him alone the charism of

infallibility. This has disfigured the face of the Roman Catholic Church, causing it to lose the resemblance to the Holy Trinity, one in Its essence and equal in Its Hypostases.

Protestantism is the opposite. Seeing in the spiritual reality proper to man one of the aspects of the truth, that of the vocation of each to the fullness of direct communion with God, it likewise pushed to the extreme and through this falls into another excess—the predomination of the subjective and the individual, which is inevitably unilateral. This is why it wound up in disunion and the loss of a an organically unified life in the image of the consubstantial life of the Holy Trinity.

The exclusivity that results from the logical development of only one aspect of the truth, which pushed "to the end", letting it absorb all the other aspects of this same truth, such is the characteristic of numerous heresies caused by rationalism.

Let us now examine the papism of Constantinople, which has found its most important expression in the Encyclical of Patriarch Athenagoras addressed to the Orthodox world on the first Sunday of Lent (called the Sunday of Orthodoxy), 1950. Here we find an increasing resemblance to Rome. Constantinople's essential idea consists of saying that given that First Rome has apostatized, it is "Second Rome" that takes its place with the same rights and the same arguments. In this encyclical, Patriarch Athenagoras, like the popes of Rome, calls his see "the pillar of luminous cloud", "the invincible Acropolis of Orthodoxy and the high rock established by God", "the ark of grace", "the Ecumenical See and Center to which the eyes of all the Churches of God are turned. This center which brings together and maintains all the Autocephalous, independent Orthodox Churches in an administrative manner and by a canonical dispensation… these Churches which are only united to the Body of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church through the Mother-Church and through union and contact with Her…" "The Mother-Church, whose entire existence was nothing but a struggle to preserve the faith and the virtues of the ancestors, for the stability of the holy Churches of God, for the salvation of the entire "pleroma" of Christians; this Church can in all justice count on the obedience and devotion of her children and on the accomplishment of their duty towards Her in a complete manner…"

This new phase of Constantinople's papism, transposed into a dogmatic formula, can be compared to Tertullian's subordinationism. The latter does not deny the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, but, in its stoic understanding of substance, confesses its divisibility, and in unequal degrees "the Father being all, the Son, a part." Likewise, Constantinople does not claim to have a different essence from the other autocephalous Churches, but rather imagines them to be diminished in relation to herself. Constantinople is everything, it is the Universal Church.[14] The others are only parts which only belong to the Ecumenical Church insomuch as they are attached to Constantinople.

Is it necessary to demonstrate that this form of papism is also an ecclesiological heresy, like the papism

of Rome? Is it necessary to say that, if applied to the life of the Church, it would inevitably lead to a deformation of our entire spiritual existence? After the example of First Rome, it attaches the right of authority and instruction in the Church to one place (and in the case of Constantinople, we must add here, to the Greek race) and brings us back to the time of which the Gospel speaks: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (John 4:20).

Patriarch Athenagoras makes belonging to the Ecumenical Church depend on the tie to Constantinople. This is not the belief and confession that have been transmitted to us from the Early Church.

“The One Church is, before all else, the Holy Church. But in the proper sense of the word “Only the Lord” is holy. The Church is holy because she is sanctified by Him, because She participates in the Divine Life and because the Divine Unity and the Church’s communion with the Lord is the source of Unity in the Church. The Church is One since She possesses one sole source of holiness and can only be One by the power of this holiness. The Church is Holy in every place and not only in a certain place our by virtue of a certain place. Thus the Council of Carthage wrote to Pope Celestine, “The fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit is not diminished in any place.” The Church is One as the branches are united to their vine, for She abides in union with Christ, the Source of Her life (John 15:1-5). The Lord prays that His disciples may be “perfect in unity” by virtue of their ascension through Him to the fullness of Divine Life (John 17:22-23). When Saint Paul speaks to us of the Unity of the Church, he does not make this unity depend on one sole administrative center, but on the communion of one sole bread and one sole cup, on the Body and Blood of Christ the Lord, Who is the Only Head of the Church (1 Corinthians 10:14-17; Ephesians 4:15-16). (Journal of the Patriarchate of Moscow 1948, issue 8, p. 68).[15]

“Drawing her sanctification directly from the Spirit of God, each local Church is sufficient in Herself.[16] But as this source of sanctification is one, She always remains One Church. There can be no common earthly center to which all the local Churches should submit, for the existence of such a center alongside the heavenly center would introduce a dualism into the Church and break Her unity. (Troitsky, “On Autocephaly in the Church” Journal of the Patriarchate of Moscow, 1948, issue 7, p. 34).

If the theses of Patriarch Athenagoras were applied in life, the Church would lose the truth unity proper to Her, of which the great theologian Khomiakov speaks in these terms:

“The interior unity is true, the product and manifestation of freedom; the unity based neither on a rationalist science nor on an arbitrary convention, but on the moral law of mutual love and prayer; the unity where, notwithstanding the hierarchical gradation of priestly functions, none is subservient, but where all are equally called to be participants and cooperators in the common work, so in the end unity

by the grace of God and not by a human institution, such is the unity of the Church."

Then he says: "In Romanism, properly understood, unity for Christians is uniquely the unity of obedience to a central power. It is their subservience to a doctrine in which they do not cooperate and which remains permanently exterior to them (for it resides uniquely in the one hierarchical head)… It is evidently unity in the conventional sense and not in the Christian sense" (The Latin Church and Protestantism, pp. 301-302).

"The Chuch requires perfect unity, just as She can only give in return perfect equality, for She knows brotherhood but does not know subjugation" (p. 61).

"The Mother-Church… can in all justice realy on the devotion and filial obedience of her children and on the fulfillment of their duty to Her in an exact and eager manner." Having the pretention that Constantinople is the Mother of the Churches, Patriarch Athenagoras, in this appeal, following the example of the Popes of Rome, addresses himself directly to the Orthodox of the Universe, inviting them to submit to him. Let us pass in silence with regard to which Churches and to what degree Constantinople has been Mother. Let us allow that it can really call itself the Mother of all the Churches. Nevertheless, to derive from this the expectation for submission would be contrary to Orthodox triadology, according to which the relation between the Father and the Son does not remove the absolute equality of the hypostases. "He Who is begotten of the Substance is equal to Him Who begets." Thus think the Holy Fathers (Gregory of Nazianzus). Even the Jews understand it. "… He said that God is is own Father, making Himself equal to God" (John 5:18).

In the life of the Church, the relation of Mother-Church and Daughter-Churches has never been recognized as a basis for superiority of authority or even of honor. This becomes clear through the example of the Church of Jerusalem, which is incontestably the Mother of all the Churches, including that of First Rome. Rome is proud of possessing the tomb of Peter. In Jerusalem, there is the luminous Sepulcher of the Lord, the Savior of the world. Rome is proud of the "red blood" of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. It was in Jerusalem that the Redeemer of the world shed His Divine Blood. Rome is proud of the glory of the "eternal city". In Jerusalem, the Lord, the King of Glory, preached, suffered and rose again. In Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, He blessed the disciples and ascended to heaven in glory. In Jerusalem, in the Upper Room of Sion, the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and those who were with them. That is, upon the entire Church. It was in Jerusalem that the Most Holy Mother of God spent her life. It was in Jerusalem that the first Council of the Apostles, presided over by James, the Brother of the Lord, took place. And, despite all this, in the period preceding the First Ecumenical Concil, Jerusalem even lost its independence and was placed under the Metropolitan of Caesarea in Palestine.

A tendency to discredit the principle of the equality of the local Churches seems to us to be the most

essential element of Patriarch Athenagoras' encyclical. In other words, we notice in it the start of a struggle against the principle of "autocephaly". This idea appears, for the first time in the Voice of the Church (Ekklesiastike Phone, a journal in Athens) at the moment when the Bulgarian Schism was coming to an end (1945). Mr Sepranzas, the ex-General Procurator of the Synod of the Church of Greece of Athens, indignant at the resolution of this schism by the Patriarch of Constantinople under Moscow's influence and without prior notice on the part of Athens, published a series of articles full of insults toward the Bulgarian Church as well as the Russian Church and all the other Slavic Orthodox Churches. At the same time, the fraternal invitation of the Patriarch of Moscow to the Patriarch of Constantinople to attend his enthronement being described by Mr Speranzas as an attempt to seek Constantinople's authority, he raises the question of the universal importance of Byzantium's authority and declares the principle of autocephaly to be erroneous. (Not having the issues of this journal, we cite them from memory).

Among the Russian theologians, it is especially the Rev Archpriest Basil Zenkovsky and the Rev Fr Alexander Schmemann who have expressed themselves on this subject. Confusing the idea of "autocephaly" with that of "nationalism" in order to reject both in the name of a "universalism", they destroy the very principle of the structure of the Universal Church. The Rev Fr Zenkovsky writes, "Christianity went wrong in allowing the formation of Churches called[17] national." And again, "Christianity being confined[18] in too narrow national frameworks did not appear to the eyes of men in all Her fullness." (Messenger of the Christian Movement of Russian Students, Munich, 1949 issues 11-12, p. 10).

It is more difficult to limit ourselves to a short citation from the precis of the Rev Fr Schmemann to summarize his ideas. He reaches the same conclusions as the Rev Fr Zenkovsky by exaggerating the role of the national moment, which is only an accidental detail in the life of the Church. But, more objective than his elders, he manages to touch upon the true reason that lies at the origin of the inflammation of national feeling in the life of certain local Churches. To wit, the narrow imperialism of the Greeks on the ecclesiastical and political levels. He writes:

"In Byzantium's understanding, the baptism of new peoples necessarily implied their introduction into the political and religious organism of the Empire and their submission to ecumenical, Orthodox authority. But in reality, this Empire had long lost its universal and supra-national character and for these newly-converted peoples, this Byzantine ideology too often became a Greek imperialism in the ecclesiastical and political domains" (p. 11).

Further on, speaking about the "decomposition (?) of the universal consciousness within Orthodoxy", he identifies the concept of autocephaly with that of nationalism and independence.

“The principle aim of each people-state became obtaining autocephaly, understood as the independence of a given national Church from the ancient centers of the East, and above all from Constantinople… It is hard to deny that the principle cause of this unfortunate process lies, above all, in the transformation of Byzantine universalism into Greek nationalism. It is important to understand that the identification of the meaning of autocephaly with independence is a characteristic symptom of this new spirit which appeared at that time in the Church and which shows that the Christian consciousness allows itself to be inspired by a statist nationalism, instead of transforming and enlightening it” (op. cit. p. 13).

Without letting ourselves be carried along into a detailed analysis of this quote, we will limit ourselves for the moment to saying that we do not agree with the author’s conclusions, forming our opinion in terms that are almost his own, but reversing the sense of his affirmations. We think that despite the national and political elements brought along by the Orthodox peoples in their quest for the constitution of their Church, it is the very essence of the Church, a theandric organism, which imposed the forms of this constitution. We justify our conclusion opposed to that of the Rev Fr Schmemann by the incontestable fact of the existence of these forms since the beginning of the Church. These forms were not a new invention of a national and statist consciousness; they were simply transmitted to new Christian peoples.

Let us continue our examination of the principle of autocephaly. It is no surprise that Constantinople has now started a struggle against this principle: it is in the nature of every papism. Rome does not accept this principle either. Here is what the priest Tyshkevich says in his “Treatise on the Church”, cited above:

“In the universal Church, local churches are acceptable as parts of one sole organism, like branches depending on the one, central trunk, but not as completely independent, whole and autocephalous ecclesiastical formations, united only by an exterior resemblance, by a common spirit and a common faith. The “centralization” of the Church can strengthen or weaken under the influence of temporary and local conditions, but the complete autocephaly of the local churches is not admissible under and pretext. The Church would then be polycephalic, with many heads, which is impossible for her theandric nature” (p. 34).

“… the confessions that allow the carving up of the Church into sects or even into “autocephalies” completely free and independent from the center can be neither the true Church nor even a “branch”, a part of the Church. One sole hierarchy is proper to the Church; the federation of several completely independent hierarchies is in contradiction with her nature. The complete autonomy of the parts is impossible. The Church is not a union of organisms, united only by an identical principle of spi

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/45982/