

Bishop Basil of Amphipolis

Continuity and Change: the Episcopal Vicariate in the context of Orthodoxy in Western Europe.

I would like to begin by saying what a joy it is for me personally to see so many people here, and to see what I really perceive as the human embodiment of the continuity of Metropolitan Anthony's work in this country for so many years. Many of you have not only subscribed your £10 for the day, which will be used to cover the administrative costs and the use of St Andrew's Church for the day, but also have made very generous donations. I would like to thank all of you who have done this.

My talk this morning will be divided into two sections: first a historical overview, and then, after some time for response and questions, a consideration of the more practical aspects of where we are.

I don't know how much you as individuals have followed the history of Orthodoxy in the twentieth century, but it has been for the Orthodox Church as a whole a period of quite extraordinary change – and very often of chaos. The political turmoil of the twentieth century probably affected the Orthodox Church more than any other Christian community. What we are most aware of, of course, is the effect of the communist Revolution in Russia in 1917.

The effect of the communist revolution in Russia

If we go back behind 1917, we find that Russia is by far the most important Orthodox country in the world. It covers an enormous area, and at an early stage became a major European power. The Russian State is highly developed, and the missionary activity of the Russian Church, which followed the enlargement of the State, had led to its spread from its original home in Kiev up to Vladimir and Moscow, to the borders of Finland and then east across Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. Missionaries reached the Russian territory of Alaska at the end of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century a diocese was established by St Innocent, later Metropolitan of Moscow. At first it was called the Diocese of the Aleutian Islands, and then the Diocese of the Aleutian Islands and All North America. That was still its name when the first edition of Isabel Hapgood's *Service Book* was published in 1906.

The Russian Church was the only Church among all the Orthodox Churches that was in a position to engage in such activity. This world of power and influence came to an end, however, in the revolutionary violence of 1917. The Bolshevik government confiscated all Church property, all land, all bank accounts – everything was taken away. The Moscow council of 1917-18, which took place during the Revolution, was never able to finish its work, and a violent persecution of the Church began almost immediately.

As you know, this led to millions of Russians and Russian-speakers leaving Russia. Those who went eastwards – you have to remember that the First World War was still going on, and there was an enormous military front across Europe preventing movement to the west - went to Siberia, to China, and from there to Australia, and the United States. Others went south to Crimea, and from there to Constantinople, to

Belgrade, to Paris, to England, to America. There took place a worldwide movement of people as a result of these political upheavals.

Because we are looking at the background of the Exarchate of Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe, I would now like to go back and look at just what the Orthodox Church looked like in Western Europe before 1917. Basically what you find are embassy chapels scattered across Europe and a number of rather striking churches in traditional Russian style that were built by the Imperial family or other wealthy individuals in places that the rich visited in Western Europe – in Paris, in Nice, in Biarritz and in various famous spas in Germany.

In addition to that there were a few old Greek communities – in Marseilles, for instance, where a Greek community had existed for many hundreds of years. In England there were also two of three Greek parishes before 1917. But there was not, to my knowledge, a single Orthodox bishop in Western Europe. There were simply isolated parishes, directly responsible to their Mother churches, and in the case of the Russian Church, to the Metropolitan of St Petersburg.

But the Russian revolution led to not only the faithful finding themselves in Western Europe, but their bishops as well. You might ask yourself why there were no bishops in Western Europe, and the answer is that Western Europe, according to the Church structures of the first millennium, belongs to the Patriarchate of Rome. The Roman Church has been established in Western Europe from the beginning. Western Europe did not belong to the ‘canonical territory’ of the Eastern Patriarchates. It is as if a certain respect for the earlier structures of the Church had led to hesitation at the thought of establishing bishoprics on the original territory of Rome.

The initial reaction of the Church in Russia to the communist attacks on the re-established Patriarchate was to attempt to create another ‘higher church authority’ in areas not controlled by the Red Army. This was done first in the south of Russia, but eventually even this proved impossible. As the Bolsheviks moved south, a number of bishops fled before them. In 1920 a group of bishops in Constantinople was actually given permission by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to organise a higher Church administration under the aegis of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The decree issued by the then Patriarchal Locum Tenens is given in Dimitry Pospelovsky’s book, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime*, Vol. 1, p.114. The émigré bishops in Constantinople were permitted to form a Temporary Higher Russian Church Administration Abroad ‘under the supreme protection of the [Ecumenical] Patriarchate, whose duty it would be to supervise and administer the church life of Russian communities abroad both in non-Orthodox ... and in Orthodox countries.’ It was interesting to me to read this passage again, because the first time I read it I had not really taken in the fact that permission was given to these bishops to organise themselves outside Russia under the condition that they were subject ultimately to the Ecumenical Patriarch.

This took place in 1920. In the ensuing years, however, the centre of gravity of the émigré community moved further west, to Belgrade, and the bishops who found themselves outside of Russia gradually began to disregard this initial relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. You will all be familiar with the fact that in the emigration three fundamental groups were formed. The largest initially, probably

among the episcopate and certainly among the laity, was led from an ecclesiastical point of view by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), the former Metropolitan of Kiev. It was strongly monarchist and politically of the right. Needless to say, they were soon condemned by Patriarch Tikhon from Moscow.

Another group, working with Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievsky), who had been asked by Patriarch Tikhon to take on the administration of the West European Diocese, attempted a kind of neutrality vis-à-vis the political situation of the time. Both these groups, at least initially, declared that they were loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate, and both disregarded the stance taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Eventually, of course, they both distanced themselves from Moscow, and as a result in the end the Patriarchal Church hardly existed in Western Europe at all. Even in North America, where the Patriarchate of Moscow had a long-established presence, the parishes gradually distanced themselves from the Mother Church on the grounds that it was no longer free.

The communist persecution of the Church included a refusal to allow the election of a successor to Patriarch Tikhon, effectively suppressing the office, and the deputy *locum tenens* of the Patriarchal throne, Metropolitan Sergii, found himself forced to support openly the Soviet State and to request that Russian clergy outside Russia should express their support as well. Needless to say, many clergy found this impossible to accept, and initially a compromise was reached whereby only the political neutrality of the clergy was required. The situation in Russia got worse and worse, however, and a further crisis developed when Metropolitan Sergii in 1931 made a public statement that there was no persecution of the Church in Russia.

This caused widespread consternation, since everyone knew that persecution was taking place. Metropolitan Evlogii, on a visit to England at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, prayed publicly for the persecuted Russian Church in an ecumenical context. He was censured for this by Moscow, and in that same year he and his Diocesan Assembly decided to seek the protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople on a temporary basis. By doing this they returned to status proposed for them by Constantinople in 1920 when it granted permission to the refugee bishops to organize themselves in Western Europe.

The beginning of the Archdiocese of Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe

This date, 1931, is thus very important in the history of the Archdiocese of Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe. It marks its beginning. And it has existed in this form - with various modifications as a result of changing circumstances - to this day, with a succession of Archbishops in charge. This brief presentation has inevitably been somewhat schematic, but I hope that you are able to see what we have joined. The Archdiocese arose as an Exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate out of the chaos that followed the Russian Revolution and is simply one part of a much wider worldwide emigration that took place after 1917. What is distinctive about it is that it accepts the leading role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the affairs of the diaspora.

The recent history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Now I would like also to look at the recent history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself. This will be again be very schematic, and most of what I say will probably already be known to those who have some understanding of the history of Orthodoxy during the last hundred years.

One thing that people often do not realise is how dramatically the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate changed during the course of the twentieth century. With the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Patriarch of Constantinople became the head of the Orthodox Christian *millet*. The Ottomans organised their Empire along religious as well as political and geographical lines, and assigned to the religious leaders of the various different communities responsibility not only for their religious life, but also for their political and social well-being.

Over the centuries, however, the Ottoman Empire gradually disintegrated. Already in the nineteenth century they had lost Egypt. In the 1820s they lost Southern Greece as a result of the Greek revolution. After that they lost Serbia, then Romania, but one thing it is very important to remember is that up until 1912, Albania and Northern Greece were under Turkish rule. In fact, Atatürk himself was born in Thessaloniki.

It was only as a result of the Balkan Wars that Northern Greece was joined with Southern Greece. Up until that time the dioceses of Northern Greece had been part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate still has a role to play in the Greek Church in that area.

In the First World War Turkey allied itself with Germany and Austria, and therefore, when the Axis powers collapsed, Turkey also emerged defeated. We are living with the results of this final collapse of the Ottoman Empire to the present day. The diplomatic settlement after the War led to the Ottoman Empire being carved up and responsibility for the various pieces being handed over to the West European powers, in particular Britain and France. The borders of Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine were fixed at that time, at the end of the First World War.

For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, the most important historical development was the ill-fated and ill-conceived invasion of Turkey by Greece in 1922. The invasion was an attempt by the Greeks to reassert political control over western Asia Minor and Constantinople. It was soundly defeated by the Turkish army. Atatürk made his reputation during the defence of Ankara. As a result of the Greek defeat there followed a violent expulsion of a significant portion of the Greek inhabitants of Asia Minor, who were driven west. But the upshot of that defeat of Greece by Turkey in 1922 was an exchange of populations. And almost all the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Asia Minor were moved across the Aegean to modern Greece, and a large proportion of the Muslim population of Greece was forcibly moved across to Turkey. The only exception was Constantinople, where no removal of the Greek inhabitants was required.

In terms of the history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the effect of this was absolutely disastrous. Within a few years they lost almost their entire human support. The Patriarchate had already lost Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania to independent Churches and was about to lose Albania. Now the Greek population which had

supported the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey itself had virtually disappeared. This process – the gradual elimination of the Greek population of Asia Minor – has continued to the present day. I do not know how many of you remember the riots that occurred in Constantinople in 1955. They took place while I was a teenager, and I can still remember reading about them in the press. Churches were burned and there were attacks on the Greek population, leading to a general exodus of the Greeks of Constantinople. The gradual departure of the Greek population continued, and today there are only a few thousand Greeks in the city.

At the same time – and this is very important for us in Western Europe – the Ecumenical Patriarchate began to expand its presence abroad. The Diocese of Thyateira, which covers Great Britain and Ireland - and at one time included Malta - was founded in 1922. At the same time, bishops were sent to North America and elsewhere. In other words, the present configuration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is inextricably linked with these events: the collapse of Turkey, the invasion by Greece, the forced exchange of populations and the extension of the Patriarchate outside its original boundaries. They form a single whole. After this other Orthodox Churches sent bishops abroad, especially after the Second World War, when there was another large wave of emigration from Eastern Europe. This led to the all too familiar situation of overlapping 'jurisdictions', a general infringement of the canonical principle of one bishop in each city, and the challenge of the diaspora that we face today.

The collapse of communism

The next historical event that seriously affected Orthodox Church life – and, indeed, ourselves in particular – was the collapse of communism. Like many historical events, it was unanticipated – certainly by professional sovietologists in the West. The collapse took place very quickly and led to the freeing of the Russian Church from State control for the first time since 1917.

Although the communist party lost its position of power virtually overnight, most government officials who were in place continued to serve and the longed-for process of democratisation has proceeded very slowly. At the same time, the swift introduction of capitalism led to a series of failed privatisations that left the wealth of the country in the hands of a few. The effect of these changes on Church life was probably also unexpected. While before the collapse of communism the Church simply had to work with the State - there was no alternative – after the collapse of communism, there was very little change, and the connection between Church and State remained very strong – but of course on a different basis. Without the support of local officialdom and the State, the Church would have found it impossible to carry out the work of restoration of churches and monasteries that has occupied its attention for the past fifteen years. Nor could it have done this work without the support of those individuals who had profited from the collapse of the command economy to amass huge personal fortunes.

Moscow and Constantinople: different ecclesiologies; the 34th Apostolic Canon

Of even greater importance for us, however, is the development, against the background of these changes in the relative sociological, political and economic positions of these two Patriarchates – Constantinople and Moscow - of what one has to accept are two different ecclesiologies. Ecclesiology may seem to be a matter of

abstract speculation, but in fact it is extremely important in the ‘real’ world. The Patriarchate of Moscow has developed, and continues to develop, what I am tempted to call a theory of ‘radical autocephaly’. By this I mean that it sees all the autocephalous Churches as being essentially equal. Each is fully independent and there is no real structural hierarchy between them.

The Patriarchate of Constantinople, on the other hand, has defended a different picture of the relationship between the autocephalous churches. This goes back to one of the most important canons of the Early Church, the so-called 34th Apostolic Canon. You may remember that some years ago Metropolitan Anthony gave his Constantinople Lecture on the significance of this canon. For him it was an extremely important landmark in the history of the Church and its self-understanding.

That canon dates back to the beginning of 4th century and is probably an attempt to sum up the consciousness of the Church of an earlier time – which is why it is called ‘Apostolic’. It provides that in any area where there is more than one diocese the bishops of that area must recognise one from among themselves as being ‘first’ among them – the *protos*. And those bishops must do nothing that affects the area outside their own territorial diocese without his approval. On the other hand, that ‘first’ bishop – who is called traditionally the Metropolitan – is to do nothing that affects the rest without their approval. In other words there is a hierarchical structure that assumes the fundamental equality of all bishops, but in order to maintain unity you must have a centre of unity in the form of one bishop, acknowledge this person and work with him. This pattern is the archetypal pattern for the relationship between bishops and metropolitans. It has been developed over time - though not extensively – to cover the relations between metropolitans and their patriarch. In that case the metropolitans themselves will have recognised one from among them who is the focus of unity for the area that they occupy. By extension it can be extended to cover the relationship between autocephalous Churches and the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The senior patriarchate during the first millennium would of course have been Rome, but with the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches the senior Orthodox bishop became the Patriarch of Constantinople, New Rome. Thus the task of being the focus of unity among the various autocephalous Churches devolves upon him. I had occasion earlier this year to see a very moving example of this type of relationship. You are probably aware that the archbishop of Cyprus has been suffering from Alzheimer’s disease for number of years, and is unable to exercise his office. Thus the question arises: what should the other bishops do in this situation? It turned out that the bishops of Cyprus were unable to reach a consensus. The position (as explained to me, perhaps simplistically) was that the older bishops said: ‘This is fine: with the Archbishop incapacitated we can get on with doing things just the way we want to do them.’ The younger bishops, however, said ‘This is not an acceptable situation. It keeps us from addressing our problems and moving forward. Let’s retire the Archbishop and appoint someone else in his place’. The bishops of Cyprus, which is an autocephalous Church, were unable to achieve a satisfactory resolution to this very important problem.

As a result Patriarch Bartholomew called together the heads of the neighbouring local autocephalous Churches - Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria - who came and met with him and the episcopate of the Church of Cyprus and addressed this issue in a

collegial form In other words, if the problem cannot be solved locally you push it up to another level and resolve it in a collegial fashion., When I visited Geneva earlier this year they were just bringing to an end the final session of the Expanded Synod at Chambésy. The decision was about to be read publicly, the various Patriarchs were about to get into their cars and go home. The decision that they came to was that, yes, the ailing Archbishop should be retired and the normal procedure for the election of his successor should begin. The episcopate of the Church of Cyprus was happy to accept this decision.

This was an excellent example of the way in which the affairs of a local Church can be moved forward through the involvement of other local Churches.

The relationship of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the diaspora: Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon

I would like now to turn to the question of the relationship of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the so-called ‘diaspora’, and in particular to the position here in Western Europe. The position of Constantinople is based on another early canon, the 28th canon of the Council of Chalcedon, which met in 451. The canon deals with a problem that was affecting the Byzantine Empire in the fifth century.

Canon 28 is a difficult canon to interpret, and what I shall be putting forward is perhaps just one way of looking at it. The problem faced by the Council is what to do with the so-called ‘barbarian’ tribes. We have to imagine that in the fifth century it was actually quite difficult to keep people out of the Empire if they wanted to come in. A number of tribes of Germanic origin, and in the East particularly the Goths, were entering in the Eastern Empire and settling there. In some cases they were made welcome, and in some cases not. At the battle of Adrianople in 378 the Roman army was defeated by the Goths and the Emperor killed.

These people did not belong to the political culture of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was based on the city as its fundamental political unit. The Empire was a collection of cities with their surrounding territories, grouped into larger entities. But the tribes that were coming in did not live in cities and were not necessarily of any fixed abode. They moved around, and so you might find a particular tribe in one diocese one year and in another diocese the next. The situation is very fluid. And the decision of the Council of Chalcedon was to ask the Ecumenical Patriarch – the Archbishop of Constantinople – to appoint bishops for these ‘barbarians’.

It is possible to argue over whether these barbarians were inside or outside the Empire, but I do not believe that this affects the essence of Council’s decision. The Council resolved, in effect, that when there is a political and social situation that cannot be dealt with adequately at a lower level by the traditional structures of the Church, you push upward the resolution of that problem to higher level, until you reach a level that can actually deal with it. In this case this task was given to the Archbishop of Constantinople, who, because his see was in the capital of the Eastern Empire, was well placed to understand the problem and its political implications. The principle enshrined in this canon lies behind the role that the Ecumenical Patriarchate sees for itself in dealing in current ‘diaspora’, not that it is dealing with ‘barbarians’, but with a situation where the upheavals of the last century have created a social,

political and ecclesial reality that cannot be dealt with adequately through existing Church structures at a local level.

The position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is that Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon points to the Ecumenical Patriarch as the appropriate person to assume responsibility for the 'diaspora' throughout the world. The situation in Western Europe is actually even clearer. As I said earlier, until the Russian Revolution there were no Orthodox bishops permanently in Western Europe on the territory of the Patriarchate of Rome. The territory of the Patriarchate of Rome abuts on two of the Eastern Patriarchates, Constantinople and Alexandria. After the schism of 1054 western North Africa gradually came to be considered to be part of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, though to my knowledge no bishops are resident there. The same applies to Western Europe. It was a natural extension of the canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople after the schism of 1054, though no bishops were appointed there. Only after the Russian Revolution and the arrival of émigré bishops did the situation change. And even so, to begin with the Russian bishops recognized the canonical presence and authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the territories that once were the province of the Old Rome.

The relevance of our position in Britain today

As I have tried to explain, there are two different ecclesiologies in play in Orthodoxy today, and it must be said that there is no universally agreed position on these issues. We in Britain find ourselves in the middle of a conflict that affects world Orthodoxy. The 'radical autocephaly' supported by the Patriarchate of Moscow declares that all the autocephalous Churches are equal, but in practice this means that the largest and financially strongest Churches are more equal than others. We in the Episcopal Vicariate, who have chosen to become members of the Exarchate of Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe, have in effect accepted the ecclesiological position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This is that the canonical tradition of the Church assigns the role of 'first' among the heads of the autocephalous Church to the Patriarch of Constantinople and that with this position comes responsibility for realizing in a conciliar manner the unity of the whole. But no responsibility comes without a commensurate authority that enables the prescribed task to be carried out.

Orthodox ecclesiology is a 'flat' ecclesiology, not a pyramidal ecclesiology, though people often speak in this way. All diocesan bishops are equal, but some of them have a special responsibility, as a focus of unity, for ensuring the oneness and communion of their neighbouring bishops. This responsibility is exercised over areas of different size, but the principle is the same. In moving to the Ecumenical Patriarchate we have moved toward the centre of the Orthodox Church as a whole, to the Church that has responsibility for the whole within the collegial and synodical structures of the Orthodox canonical tradition.

End of First Part of talk, and break for questions.