Ottomans into Europeans
State and Institution Building in South-East Europe

Edited by
ALINA MUNGIU-PIPPIDI
and WIM VAN MEURS

HURST & COMPANY, LONDON
The question of the role of the Church, and more specifically the Orthodox Church, in modern state formation in South-East Europe is an important one for two reasons. First, it points to an epoch-making ideological transformation, which signals the advent of modern politics in the region. Secondly, it touches on the critical issue of the depth, strength and tenacity of national sentiment in the several Orthodox societies in the Balkans, suggesting that nationalism has absorbed religious feeling in imposing itself through the state as the primary framework of collective identity.

The place of the Church in state formation as well brings up a critical historical issue in a *longue durée* perspective. The Church has been an institution whose presence in the history of South-East Europe is marked by a truly impressive continuity, spanning two thousand years in the southern regions of the Balkan Peninsula and over a millennium in the rest of the area. As an institution the Church, in other words, has been marked by much greater longevity than the great empires that have ruled the area, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine and the other medieval Balkan empires and finally the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore this longevity makes the Church a much more
ancient and venerable institution than the modern states, which very often appear as circumstantial, even accidental creations of modern power politics. The question that arises, therefore, from this long-term perspective on the history of the Church in South-East Europe is how, given its much greater longevity and tenacity as an institution in the history of the region this Christian, other-worldly institution, came by the end of the nineteenth century to be totally subjected to the modern secular states that had appeared just a few decades earlier, in a period from the 1820s to the 1880s.

From the point of view of the Church and more precisely from the vantage point of Orthodox religious values and principles a further substantive question suggests itself, although this particular question may be irrelevant for the secular analyst of state formation; what were the consequences for the Church as a religious institution of its subjection to the secular state, a subjection signalled by the break-up of the universal Church, and the transformation of the splinter regional communions into national churches in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? We may leave this question aside for the moment but we should not underestimate its significance for an understanding of cultural change in South-East Europe and also for a critical perspective on the behaviour and role of the Church in the area since the 1990s.

The investigation of the more historically specific question of the Church and state formation must guard against anachronistic judgements and retrospective readings of the evidence. To meet this fundamental methodological requirement one important cognitive step must be taken: the pertinent analysis must see the Church as a changing institution, which was quite different at the beginning of the process of state and nation building in the Balkans from what it became after the process was completed. We have consequently to refer to the Church at particular periods and in specific historical contexts in tracing its transition, from an institution of the Orthodox Christian community under Ottoman rule to its status as national church in the late twentieth century.

The Orthodox Church and Christian society in the Balkans under Ottoman rule, that is under the rule of a non-Christian empire, very often employing multiple forms of violence against the members of the non-Islamic religions in its domains, the Churches had been the organizational structure around which the Christian communities in the empire cohered and in terms of whose ideology they understood themselves. Under these conditions, the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire developed a strong sense of identification with their Church, which subsequently became the basis of the integration of the Church into the projects of nation building in South-East Europe. The original identification, however, was religious and cultural in character. It remained devoid of ethnic and national connotations in the age preceding the advent of modern political nations in the region.

The Ottoman conquest, by removing the Christian emperor from the political order, destroyed what has been brilliantly described by Gilbert Dagron as the "consistency" of the idea of the empire,¹ that is of the earthly kingdom, in the thought of the Christian subjects. The ideological project that the Church took upon itself under the non-Christian empire, therefore, was to recover, to the extent possible, the lost coherence so as to save its flock from sliding into forms of collective confusion. To achieve this admittedly difficult objective the Church had to devise policies on two levels. One set of policies was pastoral and was directed at the Christians, who had been reduced to captivity. Another set of policies was political and was directed at the conquering empire, toward which the Church had to prove both its loyalty and its usefulness. These policies were developed gradually after the shock of the conquest in 1453 and of course they are discernible only in a long-term perspective. In conceiving them as a strategy of survival the Church was helped, prima facie rather surprisingly, by the attitude of the conquering empire itself. It is true that the conquering empire had deprived the Church of its status as an imperial institution, by wresting from it the great places of worship upon which Christian piety had focused for a thousand years, such as the Great Church of Holy Wisdom, the imperial metropolis of Constantinople and all other of the great monumental religious buildings in the capital of the empire, which were transformed into places of worship of the conquering faith. The Christian Church was reduced to much humbler places of worship, and by the end of the sixteenth century, when its last great cathedral, Pammakaristos, was taken away and turned into a mosque, Fethiye Camii, the Great Church of Christ was reduced to being literally the "Church of Christ's paupers."² Yet the conquering empire did not want the Church to disappear. This became clear through the initiative of the young and dynamic conquering Sultan Mehmet II, the Fatih, to fill the see of

² I borrow the expression from Manuel Gedeon, Istoryia tou Christou penteion, Athens: 1939, a work focusing on the conditions prevailing in the life of the Church following the conquest.
the ecumenical patriarch that had remained vacant since 1450. Thus the patriarchate was in a political sense re-established as an institution of the Ottoman state.

The Fatih selected as patriarch a very prominent religious figure and scholar, George Scholarios, who had been the spokesman of the party opposing the union of the Orthodox Church with the Church of Rome. Obviously the Sultan's selection of the new patriarch was motivated by his broader strategy to seal off the Christian community of his empire from the West. His decision to allow the patriarchate to survive, however, suggests that his strategic thinking extended beyond this specific issue. The patriarchate as the ecclesiastical structure controlling through its wide-ranging network of dioceses the entire Christian population of the empire, could be entrusted with functions that would secure the loyalty of the conquered non-Muslim subjects. That was the motivation behind the granting of institutional status to the Church in the Ottoman state, reflected in the so-called "privileges" recognized by the Sultan upon the elevation of Gennadios II to the patriarchal throne in January 1454.

The historiographical debate on the question of the privileges of the Church in the Ottoman state will not concern us here. From the point of view of the institutional history of the Church the "privileges" or more realistically the administrative functions granted to it by the state meant that the organization of the Christian faith assumed an officially sanctioned role in the power structure of the Islamic empire. This status was reflected in the official edicts (berats) issued by the Sublime Porte upon the election of patriarchs and bishops to enable them to assume their function and in a more symbolic way in the gifts and insignia given on behalf of the Sultan to each new patriarch. The expectation of the state in granting this status and privileges to the representatives of the Church was twofold: on the level of ideology the clergymen who were supplied with imperial edicts to enable them to transact their functions among the Christian subjects of the empire, were expected to supervise "the erroneous religious beliefs of the infidels", that is to keep them in check as followers of a tolerated "religion of the book". On the level of practice the ecclesiastical officials were charged with the collection of taxes from their flock in order to secure the economic needs of the Church (which under the Eastern Roman Empire were met by the state) and also to meet the financial obligations of the Church and its high officials toward the Ottoman state.

The institutional status of the Church in the Ottoman power structure naturally evolved considerably over time. From the mid-fifteenth to the nineteenth century there were considerable changes both in the position of the Church, or more precisely its representatives, in the Ottoman institutional context and also in the organization and rules of power relations within the Christian community. This latter part of the institutional history of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire is quite important for understanding the centrality of the Church in the life of the Orthodox community. The pattern of this evolution involved a gradual transition from the autocratic authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople down to the early eighteenth century to oligarchic power sharing between the patriarch and the group of senior prelates resident in the vicinity of Constantinople from 1741 down to the middle of the nineteenth century to institutionalized power sharing between the hierarchy and lay representatives of the community in the age of reforms, from 1861-1862, to the end of the empire.

This institutional context, both on the level of relations with the Ottoman state and on the level of the organization of power relations in the administration of Church, allowed the Orthodox Church, through its ecclesiastical institutional expressions, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the other patriarchates and local autocephalous churches to survive under the rule of the Islamic empire and to continue to exercise its pastoral functions among the Christian faithful. Within this inner context, that is in the domain of the pastoral activity of the Church and its involvement in the spiritual, social and cultural life of its flock, the presence of the Church in the Christian society of South-East Europe, Asia Minor and the Near East was marked by uninterrupted continuity and witness. It was in this inner context that Orthodoxy sought to reconstitute the consistency of outlook and vision lost in 1453 with the destruction of the Christian empire. This in turn can explain the great symbolic and moral power of the Church which enabled it, despite many challenges on the part of the laity, from the late seventeenth century onward, to remain the uncontested leader of the subject Christian community in the Ottoman Empire. It was this position of leadership that allowed the develop-


ment of such a close identification of Christian Church and people in the cultural sphere, which in turn explains the preservation of a shared Orthodox collective identity and mentality in the bosom of the subject Christian populations of South-East Europe.³

This historical ontology was the product of concrete collective experience under the conditions imposed by Ottoman rule in the region. Nevertheless in subsequent historical thinking it was understood and explained in a-historical terms, which derived from the nationalist logic which coloured the cultural traditions of the individual nation states of the region from the first half of the nineteenth century onward. These anachronistic historical judgements introduced also a new interpretation of the role of the Orthodox Church, whose social and cultural involvement in the life of Christian society was reinterpreted as a precocious nationalist project, whose primary motivation and eventual achievement were taken to be the preservation of the ethnic heritage and the safeguard of the national identity of individual “peoples” in the Balkans under Ottoman rule. The role of the Church as the spearhead of nationalism represents a retrospective projection upon a pre-national age of the new character of the Orthodox Church as an institution of the nation state, a role to the construction of which we must now turn.

The Orthodox Church and the national liberation movements in the Balkans

In order to understand the transformation of the Orthodox Church from an institution of the Ottoman imperial order into the national churches attached to particular nation-states in the Balkans we must attempt a comparative analysis of the attitude of the Church toward national liberation movements in Serbia, Greece, the Romanian principalities and Bulgaria. Historically, this was a protracted process and it comprised two main phases. An early phase which involved the Church’s attitude and reactions to the reception of the ideologies of modernity into Balkan culture. This was followed by a later phase of the Church’s involvement and reactions to the national revolutions in the Balkans.

To narrate this story in all its complexity would carry us too far afield. For the purposes of the present analysis the pertinent evidence could be epigrammatically summarised as follows. Contrary to conventional impressions, which tend to point to a total opposition of the Orthodox Church to the Enlightenment as the paradigmatic conceptual expression of modernity, up to 1789 the Patriarchate of Constantinople showed remarkable receptivity to exponents of new ideas in education and philosophy, so long as they remained strictly within the framework of Orthodox doctrine in questions of religion. The example of the reform of the Athonite Academy under Eugenios Voulgaris in the 1750s⁶, is a case in point and other cases can be cited as well. Modernizing intellectuals like Voulgaris himself, Nikiphoros Theotokis and Iosipos Moisiodax, to mention just the best known, ran into trouble with representatives of traditional learning and conventional educational views—people who obviously felt threatened by their modernizing ideas—but they were never officially disowned by the Church as an institution.⁷

The official Church attitude was significantly modified after 1789 and especially after 1793. The regicide in France made plain to the eyes of conservatives and all those in positions of power the political implications of new ideas. The warnings of the opponents of modern learning seemed vindicated. Thus the 1790s became a period of ideological polarization and open attacks against the Enlightenment and its political implications. The major milestone came in 1798 with Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt. The alarm this caused in Ottoman ruling circles soon found its echoes in an official campaign led by the Patriarchate under Patriarch Gregory V against the Enlightenment and against modern liberal ideas. From the 1790s to the 1820s the Orthodox Church campaigned against the Enlightenment and this set the broader scene for the growing opposition between Orthodoxy and the liberal values of nationalism. This conflict reached its climaxes in the three patriarchates of Gregory V (1797–1798, 1806–1808, 1818–1821) and set a broader pattern of opposition that was to linger throughout the nineteenth century.⁸


⁸ Ibid., pp. 205–209.
At this early stage ecclesiastical opposition focused on the threats to social order and political legitimacy posed by the revolutionary claims of liberal nationalism on behalf of the self-determination of peoples. But as nationalist values crystallized and focused on the aspiration to create independent nation-states for all peoples and in this quest the ideals of the nation and its greatness rose supreme above all others, a deeper conflict over substantive beliefs and values became obvious. The Orthodox Church and the canonical order it upheld found itself defending the ecumenical values of Christian universalism against the parochial values of nationalism.

The clearer expression of the incompatibility between Orthodoxy and nationalism came in the opposition of the Church to Greek nationalism. This took specific forms on many occasions. One such occasion was the official denunciation of the stirrings of republican feeling in the Ionian Islands upon the landing of French revolutionary troops in 1797. The official position of the Church was stated in an encyclical of Patriarch Gregory V to the islanders in 1798, warning of the plots of the devil that often masquerade behind the clamouring for liberty and equality.

Later in the year 1798, the same patriarch issued a condemnation of the radical republican movement led by Rhigas Velestinlis, who had planned the overthrow of Ottoman despotism and the establishment of a Jacobin republic in South-East Europe and Asia Minor and called upon all former subjects, regardless of race, religion or ethnic origin to participate in it as equal citizens.

The most revealing manifestation of the opposition of the Church to nationalism came in the third patriarchate of Gregory V, which coincided with the climax of the pre-revolutionary crisis in Greek society and the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821. Since his return to the patriarchal throne in 1818 Gregory V, a very devout man and a great ecclesiastical leader with a strong sense of duty, had been trying to stem the rising revolutionary tide in Greek culture. Among many other measures, including the institution of an official censor at the patriarchal press to control the publications of the scholars of the Orthodox community, the patriarch’s most characteristic ideological statement came in 1819 in an encyclical on education, in which the faithful were admonished among many other things to avoid a recently adopted novelty of naming their children at baptism with ancient Greek pagan names instead of giving them the sanctified names of Christian saints and martyrs. There could hardly be a clearer statement of the antithesis of Orthodoxy to the most fundamental intellectual tenet of Greek nationalism, the re-appropriation of antiquity as a cardinal component of identity.

When the Greek revolution broke out in early 1821, the Patriarch and the synod formally disowned it, condemned its leaders and called upon the faithful to remain loyal to their legitimate ruler, the reigning Sultan of the House of Osman. Yet the expressions of devotion to the traditions of the Church and of loyalty to the Ottoman state did not save the patriarch. As the revolution began spreading from Moldavia and Wallachia to the Peloponnesus and the Aegean islands the patriarch was held responsible by the Sublime Porte for the disobedience and disloyalty of his flock. On Easter Sunday 1821 (10 April of that year), he was declared guilty of high treason and hanged at the central gate of the patriarchate—the gate that has remained closed ever since.

This tragic dénouement of one of the most distinguished patriarchates of the Ottoman period is nevertheless significant in underlining the institutional status of the holder of the patriarchal throne as an official of the Ottoman state. Gregory V was executed because he was judged to have failed in his duty as an official in the Ottoman power structure to keep his people loyal and respectful of the powers that be.

Greek national historiography has disputed endlessly the genuineness of the attitude of the patriarch, whose death turned him into an “ethno-martyr”, who, at the centennial of his martyrdom was canonized by the Church of Greece, a canonization only tacitly adopted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It has been claimed that the Patriarch was faking his loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and in fact he was secretly involved in the planning of the revolution. No evidence of any such involvement has been produced and all surviving texts fail to document any form of motivation supporting this view.

On the contrary it has been much more persuasively argued that the overall attitude and conduct of Gregory V was a “clear expression of ecclesiastical politics under Ottoman rule.”

Things unfolded quite differently in the theatre of revolutionary action. In the regions of southern Greece, where the revolution had taken root in the early 1820s, the Church was effectively cut off from Constantinople. Under Gregory V’s immediate successor, Eugenios II (1821–1822), the bishops in those regions ceased commemorating the ecumenical patriarch, “out of pru-
The Orthodox Church in the Balkans. Finding themselves in the crucible of revolution prudence or was this gesture an expression of their enlistment under the banner of nationalism? Their symbolically critical ecclesiastical act was indicative of the initiation of a process that over a few years was to transform the Orthodox Church in the Balkans. Finding themselves in the crucible of revolution Orthodox clergymen in Greece were shedding their traditional ecclesiastical identity and adopting a new national identity, inspired by the collective aspiration of the people who had risen in revolt to set up their own sovereign national state. Through their participation in the drama of revolution Orthodox clergymen were in fact effectuating in their own life-histories the passage of their Church to a new age. A brief look at these life cycles will reveal the "mechanics" of transition.

Upon the outbreak of the revolution, the Ottoman governor of the Morea, the Peloponnnesian peninsula, imprisoned in his capital Tripolis, Tripolitza at the time, the eight bishops of the region. In the following months five of them died in jail, adding their names to the holy legion of martyrs of the faith. But these newest of martyrs were now ethno-martyrs, martyrs of faith and nation. The three bishops who survived the ordeal were released upon the liberation of Tripolitza by the Greeks under General Theodore Kolokotronis on 23 September 1821. From then on the three bishops became active protagonists in the construction of the new state, serving in its national assemblies and undertaking high-ranking offices in the administration of the fledging new state. They had become national politicians rather than Orthodox bishops, although they of course retained their Episcopal roles.11

The pattern was not unique to revolutionary Greece. It had already been enacted in Serbia during the successive revolutionary outbreaks between 1804 and 1830 and although the relevant examples of bishops are rarer in the Serbian case, given that the occupants of the major sees were Greeks elected by the Synod of Constantinople, still the pattern of transition to a national church is discernible in the conduct and evolving attitude of lower clergy. A case in point is that of Prota Matija Nevadovic, who has left invaluable testimony of the transition in his memoirs.12 A similar and quite precocious case in the Church in the Bulgarian regions is supplied by Sofroni, bishop of Vratsa, also a canonical appointee of Constantinople. Sofroni did not go through a revolution but had shared so deeply in the tribulations of his flock at time of crisis,13 war and lawlessness that he eventually abandoned pastoral work and in 1810 joined a Bulgarian committee in exile across the Danube in Wallachia in order to promote claims to the liberation of Bulgaria. In this case too we can discern the distant progenitor of the future Bulgarian national church.

The earliest articulation of the idea of a regional national church, independent of Constantinople, came in the Romanian Principalities and it can be attributed to a great prelate with a distinguished pastoral record, Veniamin Costache, metropolitan of Moldavia (1803-1808, 1821-1823). But for him this remained a future possibility to be reached through canonical steps. When his successor Gabriel, who was appointed by the Russians during the occupation of the principalities by Russian troops in 1808-1812, seized the opportunity to style himself as exarch of the churches of Wallachia, Moldavia and Bessarabia united in one ecclesiastical jurisdiction independent of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Veniamin resisted the move toward autonomy as uncanonical. The arrangement collapsed following the retreat of Russian troops and the return of Ottoman rule in the principalities and with it ecclesiastical control from Constantinople, but the pattern for the future had been set14.

Despite the particular characteristics of each individual case the overall pattern of transition from a pre-national to a national understanding of the role and purpose of the Church appears to shape up in the Balkans in the first half of the nineteenth century as a historical regularity.

The Orthodox Church as a state institution in the new national states

By 1830, the colouring of the map of South-East Europe had changed. Whereas in 1800 the whole region south of the Danube was monochrome indicating the extent of Ottoman power in the area, by 1830 the monochrome had been broken at two distant points on the periphery of the empire. At the southern-most tip of the Balkan peninsula a different colour indicated the emergence of independent Greece and diametrically opposite on the northern

---

border of the empire another differently coloured enclave represented the autonomous principality of Serbia. This novel polychrome in politics was also the point of departure of important changes in the ecclesiastical organization of the "Orthodox commonwealth" of South-East Europe. In fact as the political polychrome became more diversified in the course of the nineteenth century, the ecclesiastical picture as well became more complicated and colourful—eventually to the point that by the early twentieth century it was even stained by the colour of fratricidal blood. How this unholy outcome came about can be understood by looking at the history of the entanglement of the Church in state and nation building in the Balkans in the period in question.

The challenge before the new states in the Balkans in the early nineteenth century essentially involved finding the means to impose discipline upon the unruly traditional societies they inherited, by breaking the multiple forms of resistance to the introduction of modern state institutions. One such source and indeed focus of resistance should normally be the Church, with the enormous moral, psychological, but also material power it commanded. The new states anticipated this eventuality with remarkable perspicacity. In this respect they showed that they had internalized the lessons of the Enlightenment quite successfully. In coping with the problems that the Church might pose to their authority the new states one after another took a drastic step. They effectively broke the power of the Church in their territories by cutting it off from the Great Church in Constantinople, which meant that the local Orthodox Churches would, out of necessity, attach themselves to the new states in order to survive in the new political environments. The new development found support in two entirely opposite bodies of normative thinking: nationalism and canon law. It may sound ironic or even perverse, but the cunning of history saw to it that this confluence of normative claims did take place. Nationalism asserted that political independence and sovereignty could not be complete so long as ecclesiastical institutions had their reference to and depended upon a patriarchate still resident in the capital of their former despots. This was an argument put forward by the foremost exponent of liberal Enlightenment, Adamantios Korais, already in 1821. On the other hand the canon law of the Orthodox Church since medieval times had provided for autocephaly to be granted to the Churches within independent political jurisdictions. The new Balkan states in their diverse ways would appeal to both arguments in order to meet the fundamental requirement of modernizing statecraft which called for the necessity of bringing the Church under the control of the state on the Protestant model of European modernity—"gallicanism" being just a variation of the same political logic.

The paradigmatic example of all this is provided by the Greek experience. The critical moment in the transformation of the Church from a communal institution in a multiethnic empire into a branch of the administrative structure of the new nation states in the Balkans is illustrated by the story of autocephaly in the Church of Greece. The blueprint for this had been set, as already stated, by Adamantios Korais, in his eight articles on the status of the Church in free Greece, a text he included in his prolegomena to his edition of Aristotle's Politics in 1821. This text is so important for the new conception of the role of the Church in the nation state that it deserves to be summarised here.

- The clergy in the liberated part of Greece does not owe allegiance to the Patriarch of Constantinople, for as long as the Patriarch remains captive and is elected by the former tyrant of Greece. The Church in free Greece ought to be governed by a Synod freely elected by clergy and laity. The examples of the ancient Church and of the synods in Russia are mentioned as precedents.
- All those wishing to enter the priesthood should be elected by the clergy and laity of the city in which they wish to serve.
- No one ought to be elected unless they possess a sound knowledge of Greek, the language in which the Gospels had been written. To the knowledge of the language training in ecclesiastical history and moral philosophy should be added. Bishops should know in addition Latin and Hebrew.
- No money should be collected by the priests from the faithful but they should be paid from public funds in the cities where they serve.
- Clergymen ought to be of mature age in order to truly fulfil their mission as presbyters of the community.
- The priests serving in cities among the laity ought to have families of their own. Unmarried priests, like monks, should be confined in their monasteries.
- Priests fulfil a public mission but they should keep strictly out of politics in order to truly fulfill the greatest service expected of them by the state, the moral teaching of the citizens.
- The numbers of the clergy and the numbers of churches should not exceed what is absolutely necessary to serve the needs of the people. The multitude

and magnificence of church buildings are not conducive to the desirable respect that religion should enjoy among the people.

This was a genuine Enlightenment blueprint for the place of the church in a modern liberal state. It would have been rather excessive to expect that it might be adopted in its entirety in the statecraft that went into the making of the new states. When the plenipotentiaries of the Greek people voted the first constitution of free Greece at Epidauros on 1 January 1822, they stipulated in article 1 that Eastern Orthodox Christianity was to be the "predominant" religion in the new state and added that all other religions were to be tolerated and their rites could be freely performed. This greatly displeased Korais, who in his Commentary on the Constitution of Greece of the Year 1822 criticized extensively the idea of "predominant" religion and argued for an unconditional religious liberalism in the new state.

Things did not develop in practice exactly according to these ideas. Of the ideas voiced by Korais on the position of the Church the one that was adopted unconditionally and put to practice not only in Greece but also in all Balkan Orthodox countries was the idea of autocephaly. This of course was not due to the decisive impact of Korais' liberalism, but to the irresistible force of nationalism that was transforming local politics and wiping away older traditions of Christian ecumenicity. Although neither the national assemblies of revolutionary Greece nor Governor Ioannis Capodistria, who tried to regulate ecclesiastical affairs in the Greek state, attempted to pursue the autocephaly project, this was put in practice unilaterally by the Bavarian regency in 1833 under King Otto. Setting up the autocephalous Church of Greece under a caesaropapal regime became one of the four major elements of statecraft in the kingdom of Greece immediately after independence. The other three being the creation of a regular army, administrative centralization and the establishment of a fiscal and taxation system. It is obvious that the new regime imposed on the Church by the state was an integral part of the project of administrative and institutional modernization upon which state building was based. The philosophy of this enterprise involved the introduction of the rules and procedures of modern statecraft into the operation of the main institutions of public life so as to bring them more effectively under the control of the state and to gear their workings toward the modernization of society. The Church became a component of the public sector, its structure was integrated into the state administration and the clergy became public functionaries. The modernizing purpose of the new arrangements came across at its most characteristic in the drastic measures taken in connection with the most traditional and resistant component of the ecclesiastical structure, monasticism. Most monasteries were dissolved (all those with fewer than six monks) and their lands were confiscated by the state. Thus from 524 monasteries in the kingdom only 146 survived. Monastic lands were added to the lands left behind by former Muslim inhabitants of Greece to form the "national lands" which were meant for distribution to landless peasants.

The unilateral declaration of autocephaly, which was the major precondition of the institutional modernization of the Church, caused a protracted crisis between Greece and Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarchate objected to unilateralism as a serious violation of the procedures stipulated by Orthodox canon law and refused to recognize the new ecclesiastical arrangements in Greece. This caused serious opposition to autocephaly in Greece itself led by a distinguished clergyman and theologian, Constantine Oikonomos. The Church of Greece remained in a condition of schism, unrecognized by the Orthodox Churches until 1850 when the Ecumenical Patriarchate, following a formal application by the Greek government and the Synod of the Church of Greece, issued a patriarchal tome canonically granting autocephaly and readmitting Greece into the communion of Orthodox Churches.

This pattern of institutionalization of the Orthodox Church as part of the new state structures was re-enacted, with variations, everywhere in the new Balkans. In contrast to Greek unilateralism, nevertheless, the autonomous principality of Serbia followed faithfully the formalities of canon law and obtained smoothly from Constantinople the status of autonomy of her Church in 1831, following an application by Prince Miloš Obrenović. Autocephaly came equally smoothly in 1879, as a normal canonical consequence of the recognition of Serbian independence by the Congress of Berlin the previous year. Upon the accession to independence, the Serbian government and hierarchy applied to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and received the tome of autocephaly from Patriarch Joachim III.


18 Ibid., p. 182.
20 For Jean Mousset, La Serbie et son Eglise (1830-1904), Paris: Droz, 1938 (Collection historique de l’Institut d’Etudes Slaves à l’Université de Paris, No. 8), pp. 54-66; 311-313.
What is particularly interesting from a political point of view is the way in which the fifty years following autocephaly a process of ecclesiastical integration was employed in the service of political and national integration as the kingdom of Serbia expanded in the Western Balkans. The ecclesiastical history and political adversities of previous centuries had left a heritage of extreme fragmentation of ecclesiastical jurisdictions ministering to the religious needs of Orthodox Serbs. Between 1879 and 1920 the Orthodox Serbian community was governed by at least six ecclesiastical jurisdictions (Carlowitz, Montenegro, Dalmatia and Cattaro, Belgrade, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Southern Serbia, the latter two dependent on Constantinople). Following the Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars and Serbia's participation in the First World War on the side of the victors, which prepared the ground for the advent of the Yugoslav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the need of ecclesiastical integration led to still another appeal in 1919 to Constantinople, whereby consent was requested for the integration of the six jurisdictions into one united patriarchate of all Serbs. On 12 September 1920, the feast day of all Serbian saints, the unification of all jurisdictions into one Serbian Patriarchate was solemnly celebrated. On 2 April 1922, an official mission from Constantinople headed by Metropolitan Germanos of Amasya delivered the patriarchal tome, issued by Patriarch Meletios IV, to the Patriarch of all Serbs, Demetrie. Thus ecclesiastical integration came to cement the unity of the new kingdom and patriarchal status came as its crowning glory, evoking as well the unity of the Serbian religious community in time through the revival of its patriarchal dignity, originally enjoyed by the ancient patriarchate Peć, which had been proclaimed twice in the past, in 1346 and 1557.

By contrast to Serbia's canonical conscience and respect of procedural formalities, Romania imitated Greek unilateralism in institutionalizing her Church as part of her own state and nation building. Following the union of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia under Prince Alexander Cuza in 1861, measures were initiated for the unilateral independence of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian lands. Already in 1859 upon his election to the princely thrones of both principalities, Cuza had introduced drastic secular policies in regulating ecclesiastical affairs. The most radical measure was the confiscation of monastic lands following the Greek precedent in this respect. This strained relations with the Orthodox patriarchates and monastic foundations in Athos, Sinai and Jerusalem, which possessed extensive estates in the principalities.21 In 1865, the Orthodox Church in the united principalities was proclaimed independent of every foreign authority, was placed under a synod of Romanian prelates presided over by the "primate of Romania" and all elections and appointments were made subject to state approval. Constantinople refused to recognize these developments and thus after the Greek schism a second schism emerged in Balkan Orthodoxy involving Romania this time. The problem was not settled until 1885 when, following the recognition of Romanian independence at Berlin in 1878, the Metropolitan Calinic of Wallachia applied to Constantinople for autocephaly and received a patriarchal tome from Patriarch Joachim IV.22 Despite autocephaly and the stipulations of the 1885 tome for self-government, royal involvement in ecclesiastical affairs remained endemic and the Church was repeatedly used for the promotion of the aspirations of Romanian nationalism, both internally and externally. A new serious problem with Constantinople arose in the early twentieth century on account of attempts to bring Vlach communities in Macedonia and Epirus under Romanian ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

As it had happened in the case of Serbia, the autocephalous Church of Romania served paradigmatically on the levels of symbolism and psychology, the project of the national integration of the kingdom of Greater Romania that emerged from the First World War. Enormous territorial gains in the war brought new jurisdictions in Transylvania, Bukovina, the Banat, Bessarabia and Dobrudja into the Romanian Church, which undertook an active role to cement not only the Orthodox conscience, but also the Romanian identity of the populations in these regions.23 To celebrate its new status as the Church of a great kingdom, the Church of Romania assumed the patriarchal dignity in 1925. This final act in the national institutionalization of the Romanian Church was the only one that was transacted according to the formalities of canon law, with prior consultation and agreement with Constantinople.

The role of the Orthodox Church in national assertion in the Balkans is most clearly and dramatically illustrated in the case of the Bulgarian Exarchate. From a Christian point of view this is a sad story. If the Greek and Romanian examples of national assertion through the Church led to breaches of canon law and to violations of ecclesiastical formalities and procedures, the Bulgarian drama involved not only such canonical failures but violence on a

large scale, the exertion of physical force upon innocent Christian faithful in Macedonia and Thrace and on many occasions the turning of Christian churches from places of worship and Eucharistic communion into battlefields of armed groups using fire and axe in the name of Christian order.24

The paradox in the Bulgarian case is that the claims of ecclesiastical emancipation preceded the emergence of an independent state and ecclesiastical conflict became a substitute for fighting a national liberation struggle. What emerges from the historical record, therefore, is illuminating not so much for an understanding of the institutionalization of the Church as part of modern state formation, but of its uses as an instrument for the promotion of the aspirations of Bulgarian nationalism with the objective of attaining state independence. In this case we have national church formation as the major stage of nation building preceding the construction of the state. In other words, the historical sequence observable in the other Balkan cases of the modern state taking over the Church and transforming it to meet its own requirements of modernization, institutionalization and integration, was reversed in the Bulgarian case. This does not make the Bulgarian case less significant for understanding Balkan ecclesiastical politics and for following the process of state and nation building in the region.

It is not easy to summarise the complex story of the Bulgarian Exarchate. In the outline that follows I will only focus on the reconstruction of the Orthodox Church in the Bulgarian lands as an institution of national assertion. The growth of nationalism in Bulgarian intellectual circles in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the spread of education in the Bulgarian heartlands north of the Balkan mountains in the same period, had a differentiating impact upon Bulgarian clergy and hierarchy who gradually came to conceive their mission as ministering not only to the spiritual needs of an Orthodox people, but also as serving the interests of a Bulgarian national community. After the Crimean War this led members of the hierarchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Bulgarian origin to voice claims to ecclesiastical autonomy and also to demand a more active Bulgarian role in the administration of the Patriarchate. A number of patriarchs, including Joachim II, Sophronios III and Gregory VI showed remarkable understanding toward Bulgarian claims and appeared prepared to go a significant way to meet those Bulgarian demands, which they judged canonically acceptable and reasonable, such as the appointment of Bulgarian bishops in Bulgarian regions and greater Bulgarian representation in the organs of the Patriarchate. Gregory VI even discussed the prospect of setting up a Bulgarian exarchate, an autonomous ecclesiastical institution charged with the religious administration of Bulgarian communities in the empire. These measures cost the patriarchs involved considerable criticism from the direction of Greek nationalism. The Bulgarians nevertheless did not appear satisfied and repeatedly brought the Church before unilateral and uncanonical steps, which in 1861 caused the condemnation and defrocking of three Bulgarian bishops.25 The incompatibility between the motivations of the two sides was absolute and insurmountable. The Bulgarians had political motives, and would not accept anything that did not meet their requirements of national assertion and control of their community through the Church in the absence of a state. On the other hand the Patriarchate of Constantinople felt constrained to uphold canonical requirements and procedures and as time went by, successive patriarchs came under considerable pressure from Greek nationalism and from a younger generation of nationalist bishops within the Church to resist Bulgarian claims. With Russian support the Bulgarians obtained in 1871 a firman from the Sublime Porte setting up their Exarchate with its seat in Istanbul itself.26 This was intolerable to the Patriarchate, which refused to give its consent to this development and convoked a Synod of Orthodox patriarchs to deal with the problem. The Synod met in August and September 1872 and condemned the doctrine of “ethnophylytism” as heretical and incompatible with Christian teaching, and accused those following the Bulgarian Exarchate for succumbing to it. The Exarchate was proclaimed schismatic and was put outside the communion of Orthodox Churches.27

This is how the “Bulgarian Schism” came about. It lasted for three quarters of a century until 1945, just because the political motives and the power struggle behind it did not allow the simple procedural steps required for its revocation to take place. Once the pertinent ecclesiastical motivations prevailed the


bitter conflict was settled in less than a month in January 1945, under Exarch Stephen and Patriarch Benjamin.28

As noted above, the Schism, which was primarily a political conflict masquerading as an ecclesiastical problem, caused enormous suffering to the Christian flock in the Balkans and contributed more than any other factor to the escalation of national and political conflicts in the region. The project of a national Bulgarian Church, nevertheless, contributed to the articulation of a Bulgarian national community that could and did sustain a Bulgarian state, as an autonomous principality in 1878 and as a sovereign kingdom in 1908.

In lieu of conclusion: the idea of a “national church” and its antinomies

By the early twentieth century, when Bulgaria attained her independence in 1908, there was no longer one Orthodox Church in the Balkans but many autocephalous national churches, closely associated with the nationalist projects of their particular states. This was the consequence of the subjection of the churches by individual states, as part of their own domestic integration and homogenization. The Church, whose leadership had passed into the hands of a hierarchy, effectively socialized into the new national cultures, readily collaborated with this project, enjoying the support of state mechanisms that cemented its own authority. This is how the idea of a “national church” came about.

This development, however, involved serious contradictions between the particularist and exclusivist ideals of nationalism that the hierarchy of the Church had readily espoused and the ecumenical teachings and values of the Christian tradition. Whether this moral antinomy was realized by those involved is an open question and it remains so for as long as the idea of national churches lives on as a dominant ideology in the Balkan Orthodox Churches.

28 See Kallistos Ware and Grigorii Ivanov, “An historic reconciliation: the role of Exarch Stefan”, Sobornost, 1, 1979, pp. 70–76.