

KOINONIA



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THE ANGLICAN & EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

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Koinonia

THE JOURNAL OF THE ANGLICAN & EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

Editorial

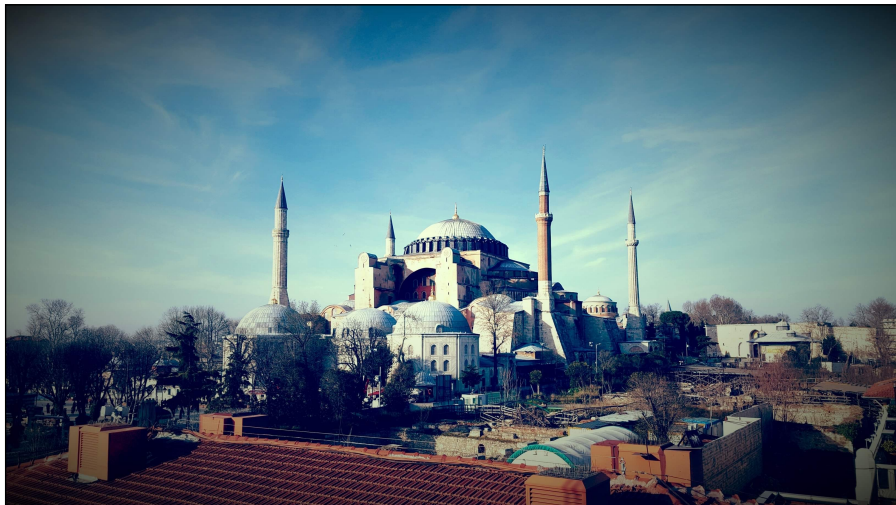
IN THE year 998, Prince Vladimir of Kiev went to Constantinople and wrote home about the worship in the church of Hayia Sophia, saying:

‘We did not know whether we were in heaven or on hearth ...
Never have we seen such beauty ... we cannot describe it, but this
much we can say, there God dwells among mankind’.

The great church of Constantinople which may be described as the mother church of Eastern Christianity, has always held a uniquely special place in the hearts of Orthodox Christians. A place of Christian worship for a thousand years until the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453, it was then converted for use as a mosque until 1934 when the Kamal Attaturk, the founder of modern Turkey redefined it as a museum and monument for all humanity - an action that has been described as an ‘act of treason’ by Recep Erdogan, the current President of Turkey.

While far from ideal from a Christian perspective, this essentially eirenic compromise was the accepted status quo until July of this year when, after extensive lobbying and a lengthy court case, a legal ruling determined that Hayia Sophia should be returned to Muslim worship. As you might expect, there was rejoicing from among conservative Muslims, and sorrow and anger among Christians around the world, but most of all amongst Orthodox Christians. For a few days, the status of Hayia Sophia was headline news, but international condemnation was not enough to reverse the decision.

There were also protests from art-historians and other academics who feared for the Byzantine mosaics, which are among the finest treasures not only of Christianity but of the whole of humanity. Since Muslim worship began again in the building, photos have been shared of the Theotokos and Redeemer in the apse covered by a white cloth and the face of the seraphim under the dome obscured by an oval shape. Distressing as this is, it raises an even bigger



question about the treatment of Byzantine churches all over Turkey which house exquisite mosaics and wall-paintings, many of which are far from the attention of the public and the media. There are disturbing reports of other churches being redesignated for use as mosques also.

Of course, controversy over the status of Hayia Sophia is nothing new. In the wake of the First World War the Eastern Churches Association (as we were then known) was involved with the campaign for the 'redemption of St Sophia' so that it might be restored to Christian worship. An article by the Rev'd J. E. Douglas in *The Christian East* (a predecessor of *Koinonia*) quotes a government minister saying 'Are there no slums in England that you go about to turn things upside down for the sake of a church?'. If nothing else, this demonstrates the vigour of the campaign and the importance of the issue at the time. The article goes on to rehearse the historical importance of Hayia Sophia for Orthodox Christians and for the whole of Christendom, ending with a passionate prediction that 'there will be no lasting peace in the Near East' until the return of Hayia Sophia as 'the metropolis of the Orthodox World'. His argument was that only the re-consecration of the church would truly demonstrate a Muslim ruler's acceptance of his Christian subjects. Subsequent history has perhaps borne out the sad truth of this prediction with Christians made to feel like second-class citizens and foreigners in their homelands. The redesignation of Hayia Sophia is an attempt to erase both the Christian past and the remaining Christian present.

The status of Hayia Sophia is at the core of this issue with two articles on the subject. It is a complex matter that requires generosity of spirit and depth of understanding, and to that end we include two articles, one by David-John Williams and another by Paul Hedges and Mohammed Abdelnour which contain some Islamic reflections on the subject.

The issue also includes a wide diversity of articles on subjects that are both domestic and international. On the international side it is an honour to include an article by our new Orthodox President, Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira on human trafficking. There are also articles about the recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the trials and tribulations of the Serbian Church – written before the recent death of Patriarch Irinej. On the domestic side, this issue includes articles about the long-lasting ecumenical hospitality at St Albans Cathedral, and of a new Orthodox Church in Durham written by Emeritus Professor of Byzantine Studies at Durham, Father Andrew Louth. There are also book reviews on the Church in Albania and of ‘Ravenna’ by Judith Herrin.

The Editorial Team hopes that this issue reflects the diversity of the AECA’s interests and work, and may be a contribution to the mutual understanding of Anglican and Orthodox Christians as we seek a deeper unity in Christ.

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News and Notices

Rest in Peace – Patriarch Irinej of Serbia

The prayers of all members of the Association are with the faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church around the world and on behalf of Patriarch Irinej who went to rest in the Lord on Friday 20th November. The Patriarch was ninety years of age and had contracted corona virus. *May he rest in peace and rise in glory.*



Ecumenical Statement on Hagia Sophia

Following the redesignation of Hagia Sophie in Istanbul, the Presidents of Churches Together in England issued a press statement, which is reproduced in full below:

The Presidents of Churches Together in England, representing the full breadth of Christian traditions in England, are saddened at the decision of the Turkish Government to change the status of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. For a long period of time Hagia Sophia has been a unique Centre symbolizing a co-existence of people of faith. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and, as a place where the rich history of Istanbul is told visually, can be a

living example of religious tolerance and respect. The decision to alter the status quo in this way is a powerful, symbolic change that is lamentable and painful for many people of faith the world over.

Archbishop Justin Welby, *The Archbishop of Canterbury*

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, *The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster*

Revd Dr Hugh Osgood, *The Free Churches Moderator*

Archbishop Angaelos of London, *Archbishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London and CTE President for the Orthodox Churches*

Pastor Agu Irukwu, *Head of Redeemed Christian Church of God UK and CTE Pentecostal President*

AECA on Social Media

The AECA has an existing Facebook group and we have also recently launched a Twitter account for the journal (@JournalKoinonia). Please do follow us on social media and share and retweet posts in order to let more people know about the work of the Association.

Do Not Avert Your Eye from the Needy: The Ecumenical Patriarchate Against Modern Slavery

NIKITAS LULIAS

ONE OF the many crises threatening our present-day society is the appalling practice of human trafficking. Despite humanity's many achievements and advancements, we see that the sins and ways of the past have not faded away, as indeed we may have hoped they would. The past injustices of history endure, albeit in different and oftentimes less immediately visible forms. Each day brings us new and unexpected revelations from the front lines about the plague of modern slavery. In addition to the illegal trafficking of material goods such as drugs and weapons, there is a global market profiting from the forceful enslavement of human beings. While modern slavery is universally condemned in the words and official statements of world leaders, the scale and prevalence of this "pandemic" is such that we would all do well to remind ourselves that "actions speak louder than words". Alongside political voices and the legislative efforts of our civil authorities, many religious leaders have also joined in the fight with their own messages and demonstrations of solidarity.

In response to this grave threat to human dignity, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew decided to take concrete measures and proceeded with establishing a Task Force on Modern Slavery. Following the tradition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a hierarch was appointed to serve as Chair and a committee was established. The initial Task Force was formed with Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, a noted scholar and defender of human rights, Presbytera Maria Drossos, who is currently pursuing doctoral studies in theology, and the Very Reverend Nephon Tsimalis, a clergyman with degrees in theology and pastoral care. Under the guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Task Force was directed to formulate a vision and goals, as well as to initiate programs that would educate the general public, promote awareness and clarify misconceptions around this complex issue.

Throughout his patriarchal tenure, His All-Holiness has prayerfully reflected on and fervently promoted the theological basis for creation care — namely, our calling to actively preserve and protect the natural environment as an organic extension of the sacramental life of the Church. In this spirit, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew also draws our attention to the topic of modern slavery. To quote from his opening address at the first Forum on Modern

Slavery that took place in Istanbul in 2017, “It is impossible for the Church to close its eyes to evil, to be indifferent to the cry of the needy, oppressed and exploited. True Faith is a source of permanent struggle against the powers of inhumanity”.¹ Indeed, indifference to the matter would be a serious and grave sin. This thought was well expressed and stated in a different manner by William Wilberforce, “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.” It was the desire of the Patriarch to not only educate the people of the world about modern slavery, but to call them to action and mobilize them. There is within the Eastern tradition an understanding that indifference may in fact be the worst form of sin. If one is aware of a problem, able to act and stop evil, but does not, then that person has committed a serious transgression against God and Truth. There are clear directives in the Bible that remind us that we are called to be proactive and not passive and indifferent in how we react to the problems of the world. In the Hebrew Scriptures we read the following: “Deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the one who is hungry, nor anger a man in want. Do not add to the troubles of the angry mind, nor delay your gift to a beggar. Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face away from the poor. Do not avert your eye from the needy, nor give a man occasion to curse you; for if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer” (Sirach 4:1-6). In the Book of Isaiah, we are called to proclaim “liberty to the captives”.

Throughout salvation history, God has expressed His love and concern for suffering humanity, especially for those held in captivity and slavery. We know the story of Passover when the Lord spoke to Moses and commanded him to “bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt”, the land of their slavery and bondage. These words are a clear statement that one person should not serve the other in a relationship of slave and master. Rather, the living icon and image of the Creator should be free and able to select his or her own destiny and path. It is for this reason that God gave us the priceless gift of free will, without which love cannot exist.

Over the centuries, though, humanity has not adhered to this principle of freedom. For the Christian people, the Redeemer came to liberate us from

¹ Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. “SINS BEFORE OUR EYES: Opening Address By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew”. Forum on Modern Slavery, Istanbul, 2017. Accessed October 27, 2020. <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/sins-before-our-eyes-opening-address-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew>.

sin and death, an expression of theological ontology that encompasses the battle against modern slavery, the battle against sin. When we study and read about the controversy of human slavery as debated in the United States in the not-so-distant past, during the time of the American Civil War, we see that the Scriptures were often used to defend the whole institution and economy of the slave trade. Today, theories of racial justification for subjugation have become nearly irrelevant as our globalized economy “justifies” itself with a fixation on the bottom line and any means available to make a profit. As such, all human life and dignity are threatened with being rendered disposable by the consuming passion of greed. Noted author and activist Siddhartha Kara wrote the following in his book *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*, “That slavery still exists may surprise some readers, but the practice of violently coerced labor continues to thrive in every corner of the globe. There were 28.4 million slaves in the world at the end of 2006, and there will likely be a greater number by the time you read this book”.² The number of people enslaved has grown over the years for a multiplicity of reasons; especially disturbing are the examples involving children, some born directly into bondage, others sold off by their parents, and the shocking instances of kidnapping. So often the targets of the traffickers come from the most vulnerable populations: the young, the mentally or physically impaired, the psychologically traumatized, the destitute. The recent instability provoked by political unrest, war, poverty and persecution, has seriously contributed to increased levels of trafficking. Those who are desperately thirsting for freedom and a better life often find themselves the victims of false promises and deception.

The realities of human trafficking are part of a greater story of oppression. Beyond trafficking and the selling of people as sex slaves, this sinful for-profit industry exploits the icon of God within the labor force, within illegal networks of organ harvesting and unregulated adoption, within the drug trade as “mules” for cross-border transportation of contraband. It is critical to inform the general public about the scope of the human trafficking problem; it is not simply limited to the sex trade or other similarly preconceived instances. In her recently published book *Stolen Lives: Human Trafficking and Slavery in Britain Today*, Louise Hlland presents the particular truths and realities of human trafficking and slavery in Britain. These truths, though, are universally relevant. She writes: “If all your knowledge of human trafficking and modern slavery is

² Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, Preface.

from news reports, as is the case of most of us, then this book is full of shocks. Three things struck me most forcibly. First, the majority of victims in Britain today are not trafficked from other countries, but British citizens. Second, they are not hidden away in locked rooms; they're in plain sight, in nail bars, hotels and car washes, on construction sites and farms. Third, this is a multi-billion-pound industry: it's big business. The British citizens who are enslaved are most often recruited from the streets. Homeless people, often with learning difficulties or mental health problems, frequently addicted to alcohol or drugs, are easy prey for determined criminals".³ These realities, as described by Hulland, are not limited to Britain or the British Isles; she uncovers situations that are actually found around the world, though they may often remain in the shadows and hidden from view.

The work of the Great Church of Christ, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, did not rest with the formation of a Task Force to address these crises, but continued dynamically with the following efforts: a series of international fora, each of which brought together a diverse array of experts and activists, the publication of official statements issued by the Patriarch concerning modern slavery, and, on a more localised level, the Holy Metropolis of San Francisco established educational programs to inform parents and their children about the realities of this scourge.

In February, 2017, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew hosted a joint Anglican and Orthodox conference in Istanbul, Turkey. The gathering was entitled "Sins Before Our Eyes: A Forum on Modern Slavery" and was attended by clergy, scholars, NGO representatives, government officials, the media and other interested parties. The Patriarch gave the keynote address, followed by a roster of distinguished speakers who spoke in detail and with great insight on the issues at hand and the role that churches and religious institutions must play in combatting these atrocities. The conference closed with the signing of a joint declaration by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby. The document called upon Church leaders to find appropriate and effective ways of prosecuting those involved in human trafficking, preventing modern slavery in all of its forms, and protecting victims. The two leaders also pledged to collaborate with one another in the battle against this form of exploitation.

³ Hulland, Louise. *Stolen Lives: Human Trafficking and Slavery in Britain Today*. Inverness: Sandstone Press, 2020, p. ix.

The second international forum, “Old Problems in the New World”, took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, May, 2018. Like the previous forum, the purpose was to gather distinguished practitioners, policymakers, theologians and scholars, to explore the challenging dimensions of modern-day slavery. The conference was structured with panels, discussion groups, and an open forum which allowed for audience participation. The forum produced a “Declaration of Unity Against the Sin of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery”.

Most recently, in January, 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch hosted the third international forum on modern slavery, “Awareness, Action and Impact” in Istanbul, Turkey. The Patriarch clearly stated that we live in a world of injustice where slavery continues to survive and that the Church must lead people in the way of freedom and liberty. Among the topics discussed were the issues of human rights, local and international legal frameworks, forced mass migration, human trafficking, and the impact of grassroots action. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew reiterated, “With the sensitization of consciences, we must participate in concrete initiatives and actions. We need a stronger mobilization on the level of action”.⁴

Following the initiatives and directives of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and under the guiding hand of Metropolitan Nikitas, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco formed a Pan-Orthodox team in the greater Pasadena area that organised and hosted an educational seminar on modern slavery. The program included speakers, multimedia presentations, audience participation and open discussion, as well as a moving personal testimony from a survivor of sex trafficking. As a result of the unique event, the speakers were subsequently invited to schools and various organisations to inform even more people, especially parents and children, about the realities of modern slavery. These efforts are a clear result of the work of the Patriarchal Task Force.

Although the fora and conferences that have taken place are joined by the efforts of other faith groups and public commissions, it is difficult to speak of quantifiable change in the actual criminal spheres of activity. Human beings are reduced to a commodity that can be bought and sold, used and abused in the labor force, or left in the shadows to suffer the injustices of greed. Sadly, false job offers and other deceptive means are consistently used to draw potential victims into the web of exploitation. Women and children are the greatest victims of such recruitment techniques, as they are the most vulnerable groups. The great nations of the world, where wealth and power may abound, are also

⁴ Bartholomew 2017, Opening Address

those that rank first in the extensive web of human slavery, with a multitude of structural loopholes in place to avoid the prosecution of traffickers. In the book *Human Trafficking Around the World: Hidden in Plain Sight*, the authors write, “Many trafficking victims are never actually sold because they are acquired, transported, and exploited by a single crime network ... Breaking the spirits of slaves begins during transportation and continues once the slave is sold. More torture, rape, and humiliation await slaves as their owners do everything possible to ensure they will service clients submissively and never try to escape.”⁵ The same authors state, “The contemporary sex trafficking industry involves the systematic rape, torture, enslavement, and murder of millions of women and children, whether directly through homicide or indirectly through sexually transmitted diseases and drugs. Because the laws in most countries against rape, torture, and homicide are more punishing and better enforced than those against sex trafficking — which can be constructed as the aggression of rape, torture and homicide — the fate of the world’s sex slaves remains terribly grim”.⁶

While there are, indeed, serious physical consequences to abuse inflicted by the “masters to the slaves”, there are even more serious psychological scars that may remain as open wounds long after the victims have been freed. It is often the case that the concern for prevention dominates much of the public’s discourse on trafficking, while issues affecting the survivors themselves are often overlooked or forgotten. Part of the vision of the Task Force is to examine the aspects of forgiveness and the potential for healing through arts and material culture. Survivors of modern slavery may be helped to overcome the bitterness and pains of the past by being afforded the opportunity to acknowledge, verbalise, and express their story through painting, singing, poetry, dance and other mediums. Efforts to put an end to the crime of slavery can be united with an offering of hope to the survivors of bondage themselves. In this respect, one might recall the ancient myth of Pandora and the box and imagine an inverse situation where a myriad variety of hope is released and offered to the suffering world. The healing grace of God pours out strength to those who have been savagely and cruelly “crippled” by the agents of evil, that they may be restored and made whole. And, of course, the entire human being is to be restored, both

⁵ Hepburn, Stephanie and Rita J. Simon. *Human Trafficking Around the World: Hidden in Plain Sight*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

body and soul. These thoughts are wisely expressed by St. Romanos, the great Poet and Hymnographer, who wrote the following:

“He heals that wretched nature, held in the grip of so many sufferings.
Having mercy on it He came, and He visited all things as He is good.
He cures the afflicted, He saves those in need;
as a wise doctor, He doctors the sick.
From mortals He drives out all demons,
as God He orders the blind to see again and the paralysed to run.
He cleanses lepers by His divine will alone,
because of all things visible and seen.
You are the Creator, the Lover of mankind,
Saviour and alone without sin.”⁷

Looking forward, we bear in mind the grim realism of what an even more inextricably interconnected global reality can potentially mean for the people at the utmost margins of society. Yet, trusting in God and the Comforter that He has sent us, we will not despair or lessen our resolve. Part and parcel of this work is to also prepare and equip future generations with the theological sensitivity and social insight necessary to understand the significance of our actions on an *ecumenical* scale, with the full meaning of the original Greek word. Thus, it is our prayerful hope that the seeds planted through the efforts and initiatives listed above be watered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, so as to bear plentiful fruits: courage in the safeguarding of human dignity, increased individual and collective reflection by those of us who risk forgetting just how “comfortable” our lives really are, and thanksgiving to God for the strength and means to extend a helping hand to even a single suffering brother or sister.

⁷ Romanos Melodos, Saint. *On the Life of Christ: Kontakia*. Translated by Archimandrite Ephraim Lash. New York: HarperCollins 1995, p. 52.

The Use of Memory to Re-Found Hagia Sophia

DAVID-JOHN WILLIAMS

THE RE-CONVERSION of Hagia Sophia has elicited an avalanche of opinion, outrage and concern. Statements have been made by local Orthodox Churches, Pope Francis and American presidential candidates. The academic community, particularly Byzantinists have strongly voiced their disappointment and have moved significant international conferences out of Turkey in protest. The conversion of Hagia Sophia from museum to mosque is the most notable example of a recently emerging phenomenon of the conversion of internationally recognised and historically important world heritage sites. This effort has been tied to the aspirational “neo-Ottoman” ideology of the *Justice and Development party* which though officially secular has actively made itself the Sunni Orthodox party of Turkey. These conversions, starting with the Hagia Sophia of Nicaea (Iznik) which was a museum from 1935-2011, and most recently The Church of the Saviour in Chora (Istanbul) which was also a museum from 1945-2020 can only be interpreted as a strong affirmation of Sunni Islam over the secular Turkish Republic, hence the term “Neo-Ottoman”.

To outsiders, the case of the Hagia Sophia, a true wonder of the world, is more arresting than Turkey’s current political flavour or latest experiment in historical revisionism.¹ Hagia Sophia represents the pinnacle of architectural achievement in Late Antiquity and the measure by which proceeding feats were judged for over a millennia. The building was constructed under Emperor Justinian (482-565) in the sixth century following the Nika Riots that destroyed a significant portion of the city, including the previous church building. Hagia Sophia’s dedication is to the Holy Wisdom of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ. The church functioned as the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the sacred centre of Byzantium. So much of the history of Byzantium is set beneath the church’s celestial dome, as the site of the coronations of Emperors, the heights of medieval liturgical performance responsible for the conversion of entire nations, the dramatic flinging of anathemas that rent the Christian world in half, and the political refugee, victim of the legendary Byzantine intrigues, losing their last finger’s grip on the golden altar to the pulling of the raging mob.

¹ The Republic of Turkey officially denies the Armenian Genocide. Examples of state funded historical revisionism can be found in the *Let History Decide* project at www.tc-america.org.

Hagia Sophia's status as a museum conveyed Ataturk's commitment to secularism in the most prominent part of the urban landscape, embodying his politics in the most physically and psychologically dominant building. Hagia Sophia was the status of a monument to the Byzantine and Ottoman past, its dual history and heritage being equally preserved by its new status. The precedent for a conversion of this kind had been set in the case of the Parthenon in Athens. Thankfully the Hagia Sophia was spared the restorations of the Parthenon which included the demolition of medieval and pre-modern elements to rid the site of its Christian and Muslim identities.²

The live broadcast of the first prayers and sermon, complete with an unsheathed sword in the hand of the imam have been read as kind of re-founding of the Turkish Republic emphasising continuity with the Ottoman Empire and a rejection of Ataturk's secular Turkish Republic. The performative re-conquest's primary goal appears to be the elevation of Sunni religious identity over secular rather than a deliberate provocation of Orthodox Christians. The psychological consequences of the conversion, however, have been deeply felt by the Greek Orthodox Christian minority in Turkey and abroad.

After the initial conquest of 1453 Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque in three ways, firstly by the recitation of Islamic prayer inside the building by Mehmed II, secondly, by architectural modification (the installation of a mihrab and minbar) and thirdly, the reconstruction of its foundation myth. The new history was written by Mehmed's courtier Shems ed-Din. The Ottoman history of Hagia Sophia draws heavily on the Greek *Patria and Diegesis*.³ The goal was to place the foundation and any sacra of the space into an Islamic context. Shems ed-Din also emphasised the continuity of the space by drawing attention to the retention of the name Hagia Sophia/ Aya Sofiya because it was ordered by God and meant "house of worship of God" thus it had always been a sanctuary of the one God.⁴

According to the Ottoman narrative, Al Khidr, the time traveling supernatural Islamic saint appeared to Justinian in a dream. Khidr provided Justinian with a silver plate inscribed with exact instructions for the construction of Ha-

² The Parthenon served as a temple to Athena for eight hundred years, a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary for another eight hundred and as a mosque for five hundred and ten years.

³ Most recently translated in Anonymous, *Patria of Constantinople*, ed. and trans. Albrecht Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria* (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library), (Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 2013).

⁴ Shems ed-Din in Stephanie Yerasimos, *Legendes d'empire: La Fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie* (Paris, 1990), p. 119-120.

gia Sophia. Giving the plate to Justinian he said “Behold! This is the building plan for Aya Sofya, drawn up long ago on the table of destiny. Now the hour has come, and I bring it to you.”⁵ Later in the same account Al Khidr appears a second time to Justinian in order to fund the building of the dome.⁶ Finally, he reveals his identity and intention to Justinian: “Know that I am the prophet Khidr. At the command of the Creator I am the protector of the helpless. Now, from the World of the Unseen, the order has come to me to take care of this church.”⁷ Al Khidr intervenes in the building of the church three times. Beginning with the invitation to build the church, followed by the exact plans for its design and then finally by naming the church and vowing to protect it.⁸ The meeting between Al-Khidr and Justinian is based very closely on a popular ninth century story repeated in the *Patria* where an angel plays the role later taken up by Khidr. The genius of the Ottoman history is its subtlety, leaving the key acts of the story and simply replacing one of the characters. By making Al-Khidr the guide or inspiration to Justinian Shems ed-Din pushed the status of Hagia Sophia as a mosque right back to its very foundation, thirty-seven years before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (571-632).

The Ottoman revision of the history of Hagia Sophia did not stop there, Shems ed-Din also incorporated the building into the wider sacred geography of the Islamic world. Al-Khidr’s final intervention came after the collapse of the main dome, the source tells us that the collapse was caused by the birth of Muhammad in 571. Khidr counseled those tasked with its reconstruction that the dome could only be repaired in one way. “Such a great dome you cannot build. Do not make further efforts! There is only one possibility: If you mix the saliva of his Highness, the last prophet Muhammad, with the water of Zamzam

⁵ “Venerable master, what does ‘Aya Sofya’ mean?” He answered: ‘From the very first day, the church that you will build was named by God Aya Sofya [...]’ When I woke up, I thanked God because I knew that this old man was a bringer of glad tidings and that the church had received its name from God himself.” In Shems ed-Din trans. Patrick Franke, ‘Khidr in Istanbul: Observations on the Symbolic Construction of Sacred Spaces in Traditional Islam’ in *On Archaeology of Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Islam Past and Present Crossroads of Events and Ideas*, ed. Georg Stauth (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015) pp. 36-56.

⁶ “I asked: ‘O honourable and mighty man, do you know that we have nothing left to meet the costs?’ He answered: ‘Do not worry! When it gets light mount your horse and go out through the Golden Gate, which is the Gate of Silivri, till you come to the place of the three hills. Not far from there you will find a column of blue marble. Let them dig at the base of this column. Take what you find under it and use it for the erection of this church!’ When I woke up I thanked God”

⁷ Patrick Franke, Khidr in Istanbul: Observations on the Symbolic Construction of Sacred Spaces in Traditional Islam.

⁸ Ibid.

and add this mixture, together with some of the soil of Mecca, to the mortar of the dome, it will stand quickly.’ Then he disappeared, while the architects stood behind in a state of puzzlement. They went to the priests and told them the words of the dervish, who had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. The priests were astonished as well and set out for Mecca. There, they met Abu Talib, the uncle of our prophet, to whom they explained the state of affairs. With the help of Abu Talib they reached our prophet and filled a bowl with his saliva. Then they loaded seventy camels with the soil of Mecca and seventy camels with the water of Zamzam and returned to Istanbul. The architects made the soil and water of Zamzam into a mortar and, with this, erected the dome.”⁹

The reconstruction of the dome using such meaningful Islamic elements constitutes an ontological reaffirmation.¹⁰ The well of Zamzam is by Islamic tradition the site of an hierophany. The angel Gabriel is said to have split the ground open with his heel in order to save Ishmael the son of Abraham from dying of thirst. Later, according to some hadith traditions the living heart of Muhammad was removed from his body and washed in the water of Zamzam and was filled with wisdom.¹¹ The legendary mixing of the body of the prophet,

⁹ Evliya Chelebi, *Seyahatname*, vol 1, 124f., ‘After a while, on orders of Khidr, about 300 priests, which were led by the hermit and monk Bahira of Bosra, moved to Mecca and took some saliva from his Highness Muhammad, who at that time was still a young boy. [...] Together with the sublime saliva, the priests brought some water from Zamzam and some of the pure soil of Mecca with them for blessing. After their return, they set about reconstructing the collapsed parts of the church.’

¹⁰ ‘Önder 1966: 21/22: ‘After the wall of Aya Sofya had been erected the architects wanted to place a dome upon it. The dome, however, did not hold, but immediately broke down. At that time the prophet Khidr – Peace be upon him – appeared in the guise of an old dervish. He approached the architects and said to them: ‘Such a great dome you cannot build. Do not make further efforts! There is only one possibility: If you mix the saliva of his Highness, the last prophet Muhammad, with the water of Zamzam and add this mixture, together with some of the soil of Mecca, to the mortar of the dome, it will stand quickly.’ Then he disappeared, while the architects stood behind in a state of puzzlement. They went to the priests and told them the words of the dervish, who had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. The priests were astonished as well and set out for Mecca. There, they met Abu Talib, the uncle of our prophet, to whom they explained the state of affairs. With the help of Abu Talib they reached our prophet and filled a bowl with his saliva. Then they loaded seventy camels with the soil of Mecca and seventy camels with the water of Zamzam and returned to Istanbul. The architects made the soil and water of Zamzam into a mortar and, with this, erected the dome.’

¹¹ Sahih Muslim, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, *Sahih Muslim: Being Traditions of the Sayings and Doings of the Prophet Muhammad as Narrated by His Companions and Compiled Under the Title Al-Jami-US-Sahih* (Kashmiri Bazar: Lahore, 1976) Hadith No. 314.

the very land of Mecca itself and the miraculous water from God imbued Hagia Sophia's structure with an imminent sacred link to the prophet. These stories create both an Islamic identity for the building and emphasise its sanctity. The Ottoman conquest and conversion of Hagia Sophia was therefore contextualized as a liberation of the sacred space that fulfilled Khidr's plan as well as the prophesy of Muhammad concerning the capture of Constantinople by Muslims.¹²

It is interesting, given the care taken by the Ottomans to construct a compelling Islamic foundation myth for Hagia Sophia that the current historical conversion narrative of the Turkish AK Party is that Mehmed II purchased it legally before converting it into a mosque. When presented with a rediscovered deed of purchase by those advocating for the conversion of Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque the Supreme Administrative Court of Turkey ruled that the document invalidated the 1934 decision of Ataturk and that Hagia Sophia's conversion to a museum was illegal. The decision to divorce the conversion of Hagia Sophia from the Ottoman narrative neatly demonstrates the current preoccupation with enforcing an Orthodox Sunni identity. Fantastic stories of Islamic saints and relics of the prophet reveal far too much of the characteristically syncretic Islam of the Ottoman Empire for comfort. Mehmed's 'rediscovered' deed of purchase is now the supreme relic of Aya Sofya.

¹² The hadith concerning the capture of Constantinople is considered weak or dubious by a number of Islamic Scholars but is very well known. 'Verily you shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful leader will he be, and what a wonderful army will that army be!'

Hagia Sophia: The Meaning of Ottoman Symbolism¹

PAUL HEDGES & MOHAMMED GAMAL ABDELNOUR

FOLLOWING THE decision on 10 July 2020 that reverted Hagia Sophia from a museum back to a mosque, after 85 years, it was reopened for Islamic prayer on 24 July. That day, Ali Erbaş, head the government's Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), delivered a sermon from the mimbar holding an Ottoman sword.

The symbolism of the act accompanying this sermon, or khutbah, has triggered discussion among both non-Muslims and Muslims. While Greek voices claim it revives a neo-Ottoman vision of a conquering power, Turkey's governmental voices defended it as a cultural manifestation of Turkish heritage and traditions.

Ottoman Justification

Justifying this act, Erbas told journalists: "Khutbahs had been delivered with a sword, without interruption, for 481 years. If Allah permits, we will resume this tradition from now on." He linked this to Hagia Sophia being a mosque that emerged out of the conquest of Constantinople.

However, appealing to tradition could be problematic. In many canonical hadith collections, such as by Sunnan Ibn Majah, it is narrated that the Prophet, even on the battlefield, would lean on a bow rather than a sword when giving a speech. Moreover, in delivering a khutbah, he leant on his staff.

And in his *Zād al-ma'ād*, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350 AD) attributed to ignorance the belief that Muhammad would lean on a sword, especially if this was linked to the contentious association of spreading Islam with the sword – a misconception that modern Muslims have also been refuting, such as 'Abbās al-'Aqqād in his *Haqāq al-islām*.

¹ This article originally appeared in RSIS Commentary (No. 159, 19 August 2020) and we are grateful to the authors and publishers for allowing us to reproduce it here.

Legal and Political Debates

On the legal side, the primary debate concerned the question of whether the 1934 decision by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of post-Ottoman secular Turkey who turned Hagia Sophia from a mosque into a museum, was legitimate.

This related to the Islamic charitable status (*waqf*) granted to Hagia Sophia by Sultan Mehmet II (known as Mehmet al-Fātih “The Conqueror”) when he converted it from a church to a mosque in 1453. Scholars point out that in Islamic ruling, once a property is declared a charitable trust, it gains an unalienable, perpetual status. If the granting of *waqf* is an inviolable act, then changing Hagia Sophia’s mosque status to a museum would have been illegal.

Here, religious claims compete with Turkey’s secular laws amidst a situation which many have described as post-secularism. The sermon was seen by some as opposing Turkey’s secular and multicultural status.

While the decision to revert to its mosque status seems to fall within Turkey’s own sovereignty, that Hagia Sophia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site meant wider consultation was needed. It also was a decision that has emotional and political ramifications beyond Turkey. While Erdogan needs to bolster support for his own brand of Islamist populism nationally, it also may be designed to help stake his claim as a global Muslim leader.

Islamic Legacies

Another talking point is whether this reversion is even justified under Islamic auspices. Mehmet’s conversion of Hagia Sophia contrasted with the example set by Caliph Umar, a Companion of the Prophet, who consciously ensured that both the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem were not converted into mosques.

Against this, citing medieval Islamic jurisprudence, for instance, *al-Baḥr al-rā’iq, sharḥ Kanz al-daqa’iq*, some see the conversion of churches (and other buildings) into mosques as legitimate when territories were taken by force rather than having surrendered.

Further, a number of Muslims today cite a hadith (Prophetic Tradition) as evidence that Hagia Sophia would fall to the Muslims. However, this hadith (along with a number of related ones) were traditionally seen as relating to the end times, as al-Suyūṭī reports in his *al-Durr al-manḥūr fī’l-tafsīr bi’l-ma’ḥūr*.

Yet, at the time of the conquest, a hadith scholar al-Saḥāwī (d. 1497), in his *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi` li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'*, which included a biography of Mehmet al-Fātiḥ, never drew a correlation with such hadith traditions. Its modern usage seems indicative of a contemporary form of politicised Islamic thought.

These arguments indicate differing ways Islamic identity is debated by Muslims today. For some Muslims, Islam is a religion of conquest that can rightfully usurp the property of other religious traditions in something of a zero-sum game. For other Muslims, a deeper kinship underlies the relationship with religions, especially those seen as People of the Book (*'ahl al-kitāb*), which goes back to Islam's roots.

Ottoman History of Co-Existence

A further discussion in this situation is not just the way Islam is envisaged, but also specifically how Turkish Islam is envisaged. This was clearly raised in the symbolism of Erbaş' sermon with a sword. While a motif of conquest is part of the Ottoman inheritance, many Muslims do not see this heritage as being antagonistic to other religions.

Indeed, within Turkey, the Ottoman heritage is widely remembered as a time of coexistence and religious harmony, when Turkish Sultans ruled a multi-religious empire without major incidents of strife. As such, reviving Ottoman-era notions may be seen as promoting greater interreligious bonhomie than is often found today.

Such an image of the Ottoman's is not without justification. While Europe emerged from its so-called Wars of Religion in early modernity, many late 18th century intellectuals who advocated freedom of religion and toleration held the Ottoman Empire up as a model that contrasted well with Christendom's intolerance.

Very often, when Jews fled Christian persecution they found a welcome home in Ottoman lands. Indeed, it was primarily as the Ottoman Empire collapsed and modern ideas of national identity took their place that we saw major incidents of religious violence, such as the Armenian genocide.

Conflation of the Past, Present and Future

Religious leaders, like politicians, often appeal to a memory of their past to justify actions in the present. Sometimes these religious and political memories

overlap. Populism with appeals to a glorious past may often elicit a strong response.

As such, both religious leaders and politicians need to be wary about what vision of the past they wish to invoke. Visions of the past can easily become dreams of the present and nightmares of the future. This is why building bridges among faiths is much needed.

Saint Albans Cathedral Ecumenical Chaplaincy

KEVIN WALTON

A PARTICULAR and unique feature of St Albans Cathedral is its established programme of regular services within different Christian traditions, under the guise of its ecumenical chaplaincy. These include a Roman Catholic Mass celebrated every Friday at noon, a monthly Orthodox Liturgy, as well as monthly services in the Free Church and German Lutheran traditions. Each of these is organized by a priest or minister nominated from their own tradition to be an ecumenical chaplain at St Albans Cathedral, where they are considered as part of the wider staff, with invitations to preach and participate on particular occasions.

Although both Orthodox and German Lutheran communities had already become attached to St Albans, the ecumenical chaplaincy came to a more formal start in 1983, the year following the visit to Britain by Pope John Paul II which gave rise to a great deal of ecumenical optimism. Following from this it was the particular vision of the Dean of St Albans at that time, the Very Revd Peter Moore, to put out invitations to other Churches, which led to the appointment of both a Roman Catholic chaplain, Fr Robert Plourde, and a Methodist, the Revd Donald Lee, who both started to lead regular services in their own traditions, drawing their own congregations from local churches.

In particular it was the start of the regular Roman Catholic Mass which caused quite a stir, and the story of the first Mass, with noisy Protestant protesters imported into the congregation, and where the celebrant was accompanied by a serving team of strapping prefects from the local Catholic school, is now the stuff of legend. Such sentiments now seem light years away.

For the Cathedral, as well as being a bold attempt in the service of full and visible Christian unity, the chaplaincy is an expression of its long tradition of hospitality, through its Benedictine foundation, and before that reaching back to the story of St Alban himself who offered shelter to the persecuted priest, named St Amphibalus. Nevertheless, it is important that welcome does not simply stop at this point, but that it should lead to a deeper mutual understanding and to a shared life. As such, the life of the Cathedral has very much been enriched by the participation of members of other churches at all levels, including Welcomers, Cathedral guides, staff, and even money counters.



The Orthodox chaplaincy is led by Fr Theophan Willis, a priest in the Russian Orthodox Tradition under Metropolitan John of Dubna. He is particularly keen to facilitate the use of the Cathedral for all Orthodox Christians, and for many years, this has included a Molieben, celebrated as part of the annual Alban Pilgrimage on the nearest Saturday to St Albans Day in June, also supported by the Fellowship of Ss Alban and Sergius, and more recently a large group of Romanian Orthodox from Luton. In addition to that, the Cathedral receives a large number of Orthodox groups who come to venerate St Alban at his shrine, which, of course, contains an attested relic, a shoulder bone of St Alban. Remarkably, this relic was transferred to St Albans in the year 2002 as an ecumenical gift from the Roman Catholic Church of St Pantaleon in Cologne, Germany. Veneration of the relic also features in the Alban Pilgrimage as pilgrims stream past it after Evensong. The Cathedral also looks forward to the completed restoration of the shrine of St Amphibalus within the next few

months, which will include a sequence of newly commissioned icons of the saint and his own martyrdom.

A particular recent joy has been the return of ecumenical services to the Cathedral after the Covid lockdown, and because of its size, the Cathedral has been able to accommodate much larger numbers than other local churches. At the first Catholic Mass in July several of the congregation movingly informed me that, because of a restriction of numbers in their own churches, this been their first opportunity to make their communion since March. The Orthodox priest likewise was delighted to be able to offer the Liturgy again for the first time after a long pause. On a more spontaneous level, very soon after the re-opening, a group of Russians arrived with an icon of St Alban, making their way in a determined fashion to the shrine of St Alban. Reminders that singing was not allowed fell on deaf ears! It has been a delight to welcome such groups back again, albeit with the existing safeguards in place.

A question we often ask ourselves at St Albans is about the future direction and development of the chaplaincy. In the earlier days there was a real sense of breaking new ground, and in an era of great ecumenical optimism, even the expectancy that within a few decades some of the denominational distinctions would no longer be in place. Reading about those earlier days, one gets the sense that the ecumenical chaplaincy saw that it might no longer need to exist before too long. Very sadly, of course, this has not proven to be the case, and we have had to adapt ourselves to a new realism and longevity.

On the other hand, the reaction of visitors is still very positive when they hear of, and even get caught up in, our ecumenical services, not least from visitors from overseas. Nevertheless, I do suspect that for many of our younger, millennial visitors in particular, the very concept of ecumenism is rapidly becoming outmoded, since the very idea of denominational identity has become less fixed for many people today, in spite of the ongoing structural and organisational divisions and formal theological differences. I think that a real challenge facing our denominational hierarchies will be the growing gap between the self-understanding of denominational hierarchy and that of their membership. Clergy necessarily tend to identify more closely with their organisation; laity less so.

Safeguarding the Armenian heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh

JASMINE SEYMOUR



This image¹ is of Sevak Avanesyan, the lead cellist of the Belgian Philharmonic, playing amongst the rubble of the recently bombed Holy Saviour Cathedral (Sourp Ghazanchetsots) in Shushi - the second largest town in Nagorno-Karabakh, also referred to as Artsakh (the ancient Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh). The recording travelled across the world via social media and touched the hearts of many people. “I had a recital in Belgium, when I heard that the Shushi Cathedral was bombed, and I knew I had to go back. Prior to the war, a two-hour-long recital had been planned in Shushi, but instead, I decided to play in the bombed church, a masterpiece by the national composer Komitas called *Krunk*. I had not played the piece for almost twenty years since when I was a child, but I suddenly remembered it and played spontaneously”, Sevak told us.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWp5uSb6snU>

On 8th October the Holy Saviour Cathedral, Surb Ghazanchetsots – the seat of the Diocese of Artsakh Armenian Apostolic Church in Shushi – was bombarded by Turko-Azeri forces, twice. Weeks earlier, on 27th September Azerbaijan by Turkey’s military and financial support had launched a wide-scale offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh in the Southern Caucasus. The President of Artsakh Mr. Arayik Harutyunyan, addressed a letter to UNESCO’s Secretary General to urgently condemn targeting of cultural sites, religious heritage and civilian infrastructures. Following the bombing of this magnificent cathedral, US congressman Frank Pallone wrote on his twitter page:



US Congressman Frank Pallone at the Holy Saviour church in Shushi, 2019

“The intentional targeting of civilian targets by Azeri forces, including the historic Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, is abhorrent and deserves international condemnation. I am saddened by this news after having the pleasure of visiting this treasure last year.”

Before this war, the Armenian population of Artsakh was reportedly about 150,000 who lived in this multi-ethnic region since Noah’s time. Currently, half of the civilian population has been forced to flee homes to neighbouring countries. Numerous churches, fortresses and historic sites from the fifth century until the early 1900s attest the uninterrupted Armenian presence of this disputed region. The ancient capital of Greater Armenia, Tigranakert (founded between 120-80 BC) of the Hellenistic period was erected during the reign of Tigran the Great, also situated in Nagorno-Karabakh. The archaeological site of the ancient capital belongs not only to Armenian but the world’s cultural heritage, yet it has also been targeted by Turko-Azeri bombardments. According to Paul Ronzheimer, a German journalist, the State Theatre named after great Armenian actor Vahram Papazian was entirely destroyed by heavy bombing in the first week of the war.

As the result of the ongoing air bombardments with illegal cluster bombs, over hundreds of civilians have lost their lives and hundreds have been



*The bombed State
Theatre of Stepanakert*

injured.² Among the wounded have been foreign reporters including French journalists from *Le Monde*, doctors and representatives of humanitarian organisations. Meanwhile, half of the civilians – women, elderly and children – have been evacuated from their homes into underground shelters. The newly opened maternity hospital in Stepanakert was destroyed by air strikes, according to foreign journalists on the ground.³

“The humanitarian crisis is extremely concerning, as the Turko-Azeri forces target nurseries, schools, music colleges. Ethnic cleansing is taking place which has been totally ignored by the entire world”, Sevak acknowledged with apparent frustration.

In his interview with the Armenian news agency, Artsakh Archbishop Pargév Martirosyan said: “They are bombarding our spiritual values”.

Thousands of IS mercenaries from Syria, Libya and Pakistan have been recruited by the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s regime and have been transported to the region. Their abhorrent violations of human rights have been recorded by press and Human Rights organisations.⁴ In the meantime, the Armenian voluntary army attempts to stop the ethnic cleansing of Armenians by Turkish, Azeri and IS mercenaries and to safeguard their homes, women, the elderly and children. It has become evident that the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh was only a pretext for the expansionist administration of Erdoğan aiming to perpetrate the second Armenian Genocide, while Azerbaijan’s President İlham Aliyev has grabbed the opportunity to take back control of Nagorno-Karabakh without the Armenian population.

Three ceasefires have been negotiated after lengthy talks between the two sides and the OSCE Minsk Group members USA, France and Russia. All

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/10/05/azerbaijan-dropping-cluster-bombs-civilian-areas-war-armenia/>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgEr7OLFS8w>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54645254>



*Musician Sevak
Avanesyan with Arch-
bishop of Artsakh Pargev*

three have been broken within minutes, and shelling of civilian targets has intensified in Stepanakert, Shushi and other towns and villages in the region. The Azerbaijani side has rejected the presence of external observers during ceasefires, while the Armenian authorities have repeatedly stated that without foreign peacekeeping forces it would be impossible to maintain a ceasefire.⁵

After the Bolshevik victory in 1920, Nagorno-Karabakh was annexed to the Republic of Azerbaijan not to Armenia as an Autonomous oblast (region) by Joseph Stalin, although over 80% of its population were ethnic Armenians. Several attempts were made by the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to split from Azerbaijan during the Soviet rule that were rejected by Baku. During the breakdown of the Soviet Union, when all republics got the opportunity to vote for independence, 99% of the population of

Nagorno-Karabakh voted for independence on 10 December 1991. While Azerbaijan (among other Soviet republics) became an independent state, nonetheless the Azeri government rejected the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination. Instead, the Azeri government launched its first military offensive to conquer Nagorno-Karabakh by force in 1992, which culminated with a Russian-brokered ceasefire in May 1994. Since then, despite regular peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group, diplomatic agreement or a peace treaty has not been reached between the two neighbouring nations. Azerbaijan continues to deny the right for self-determination of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The energy in St. Holy Saviour is extraordinary; there is no other place on earth like this, the locals call it ‘The White Angel’ and God has saved this

⁵ *Independent*, 14 October 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-tensions-rise-amid-claims-of-new-attacks-azerbaijan-armenia-nagornokarabakh-turkey-territory-br040960.html>



church many times before, therefore it will endure forever”, said Sevak Avanesyan.

Just few days after the bombing, the first wedding took place at Shushi’s St. Holy Saviour church: a beautiful bride in white nuptial dress and a young soldier in military uniform were married by Father Andreas amidst the rubble and debris. The people of Artsakh remain resolute that love, faith and hope will prevail. As Shakespeare said, ‘Love is Holy’ and let us hope that the doves of peace bring peace and reconciliation to neighbours in the Southern Caucasus.

Trials and Tribulations of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro¹

GORAN SPAIC

MONTENEGRO IS a small European country known from its tourist postcards; a country of awe-inspiring Adriatic vistas, bays and islands which leaves visitors and observers enchanted by its natural beauty. Heading inland one encounters by turn rivers and fertile plains set against a background of the massive mountains which give this country its name. The Montenegrins themselves are a people proud of their centuries-old fight for freedom. This small state with the natural beauty of contrasting coast and mountain has over several centuries also been scarred by invaders from the sea and the continent. The sea brought Venetian galleys and Austrian cannon-ships, while the land brought powerful Ottoman Turkish mercenaries to crucify Montenegrins striving for liberty.

When in 1219 Saint Sava, the first Serbian Archbishop, received from Manojlo I, Patriarch of Constantinople, the tome of autocephalic independence for the Archbishopric of Zica (the seat of the archbishopric being the monastery of Zica in central Serbia), the nine original and oldest eparchates of the Serbian Orthodox Church included the Eparchate of Zeta. The Zeta eparchate spreads across and coincides with the territory of what is today Montenegro. In 1346, with the Serbian state at the height of its powers, its Church was granted its own Patriarchate, with its seat at Pec in Kosovo. It was then that the Eparchate of Zeta was raised to the level of a Metropolitanate, as it has remained to this day. Up to 1485, its seat was in the coastal monasteries, but Venetian incursions and conquests necessitated its move to the security of the inland heights, to the town of Cetinje, where its seat has remained to this day. The capture of Serbian lands by the Ottoman Turks and the fall of the Serbian monarchy from 1459 began the heavy misfortune of the people and its church, but the unity of the 'Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral' with the rest of the Serbian church, i.e. with the Pec Patriarchate, was never brought into question. There were times under foreign occupation when political difficulties dictated that this unity could not be completely realised the way it normally would, but this canonical and spiritual unity was never questioned before the twentieth century.

¹ This article was written before the news of the passing of Patriarch Irinej.

Following the 1918 Versailles Treaty and the creation of Yugoslavia under the Serbian Karadjordjevic monarchy, there appeared in Cetinje a small group of rebels who put up resistance to the new state, primarily because of their loss of the privileges they had enjoyed previously. It was on the separatist ideology of this dissatisfied little group that seventy years later a minor political party was to form and promote the idea of an independent church for Montenegro – an idea that was advocated by the former communists and declared atheists.

Indeed, it was when the communists had come to power at the end of the Second World War that the real problems and pogroms of the church had begun. As early as 1945, Montenegro's Metropolitan Joanikije (Lipovac) was imprisoned then executed without trial. The location of his murder is not known, nor his place of burial. A great number of priests met a similar fate; the monasteries were forcibly closed and the churches destroyed then left to decay through the ravages of time. God's name could only be mentioned in quiet or in secret, while the communist party implemented a brutal program of indoctrination in favour of atheism and godlessness throughout the system of schools, universities and state media that it controlled. A free press did not exist. Yet no matter how devastating and destructive this communist period was for the Serbian orthodox church in Montenegro, specifically for its organic part the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, it did not occur to any of the party leaders of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro to try to change the Montenegrin Metropolitanate's name nor to demand that it be made independent of the Serbian orthodox church. By way of comparison, in the adjoining Socialist Republic of Macedonia such a tendency had already begun in the 1960s, leaving the status of the Macedonian orthodox church in North Macedonia still undetermined and unrecognised by the Eastern Orthodox (autocephalic) Churches to this day.

The fall of communism began around the 1990s and was accompanied by the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia. The ensuing war moved from north to south of the formerly united state, leaving devastation in its wake. Attempts to solve the problem ignored the reality that ethnic identities within Yugoslavia took little account of the country's internal administrative borders. Six independent mini-states were declared to have replaced the six former socialist republics. Despite this, Montenegro, which had in 1992 voted by 97%-3% to stay in a common country with Serbia, remained in that union until a second independence referendum in 2006. This second referendum showed that Montenegro's problems had not ended with the war. It was heavily tainted by the machinations of the ruling Democratic Socialist Party of Milo Djukanovic

(which included telling prisoners they would be released if they voted for independence, giving non-Montenegrians temporary voting rights and denying the one-third of Montenegro's population living or working in Serbia any right to vote). Finally, his government announced that a small majority had voted for independence. It is important to emphasise here that during these extremely tense days and months when inter-communal tensions were rising to boiling point, the Orthodox church in Montenegro, i.e. the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, worked only to calm the situation down. This did not spare it from ruling party attacks, with president Djukanovic announcing on state television that harmonious relations between the state, state organs and the church required the latter to be independent. From the rest of the Serbian orthodox church, that is, not from him. For one must also keep in mind that in his references to the state and its organs he presupposed himself at the centre, in the classic sense of an autocratic ruler.

A word here about Milo Djukanovic might be appropriate and illuminating. Europe's longest serving ruler has long been dogged by accusations of corruption, both national and international. On his watch Montenegro's status has been internationally downgraded from new democracy to hybrid authoritarian regime, known for its smothering of political opposition and silencing of journalists. 2015 found him nominated by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project for a lifetime achievement award as Person of the Year in terms of Crime and Corruption – alas, for his long-term contribution to both.

For president Djukanovic, manipulating the national feelings of the citizens of Montenegro has been part of his way of staying in power. Most Montenegrians have traditionally held a dual identity, feeling themselves simultaneously Serbian and proudly Montenegrin. This certainly still applies to the 72.1% of Orthodox believers in Montenegro, their identification derived from their cultural tradition and spiritual sense of self; one shared throughout their history by the people on these lands, shaping their common destiny in war and peace, befitting their membership of a single, united Eastern orthodox church. Djukanovic, however, viewed this reality as a Gordian knot, and decided to cut it by raising the temperature of his antiserb rhetoric to the maximum, castigating the Serbian orthodox church and Serbian nationalism as the root cause of problems in Montenegro, rather than any deficiencies in his own rule. This formula had after all worked rather well in the other Yugoslav republics. Simultaneously, in the best tradition of *divide et impera* he expressed his openness towards Montenegro's other faith communities (the 20.1% Muslims of Bosnian and Albanian identity, 3.4% Catholic Croats and a small number of Protestant

and Jewish believers, as well as atheists and agnostics), presenting himself as a democrat on the European model.

In 2011, Đukanovic and his government duly made agreements with the Holy See, as well as with the Islamic and Jewish communities the following year; agreements defining their legal status and regulating their relationship with the state. The Montenegrin government agreed to recognise Catholic canon law as the Church's legal framework and also safeguarded the Church's property rights. The Serbian Orthodox Church made repeated efforts from 2012 to reach a similar agreement with the government but was pointedly ignored.

Things then got even worse. In 2019, the government played its hand, formalising and extending its position in the most discriminatory manner with its 'Law on Freedom of Religion'. This was passed on 5th December in the middle of the night, with the opposition absent. It is also important to note that this law was not preceded by standard legal procedures, and that interested parties whom this law would affect were not consulted in advance nor even asked for an opinion. There were no public meetings or debates in which legal experts could provide their views. It was clear from the start that this law was directly aimed at the Serbian Orthodox church, since it was the only religion which had not been given its own bilateral agreement with the state. So it was that the largest by far faith community in Montenegro was placed in an inferior position to all the others, and indeed to all other legally-constituted entities in the country. Moreover the key provisions of this law 'on freedom of religion' were to do with forcible expropriation of Serbian church property by the government, with no right of appeal except to a department of the government. In this way and in contravention of the Montenegrin constitution and all relevant international legal acts and agreements regulating freedom of churches and faiths, the Orthodox church was being deprived of the protection of the law. This was the gateway to it also being deprived of its biggest and most important sacred objects; its churches, monasteries, lands and forests; all of which it had owned for centuries. These were to be in the hands of Montenegro's atheist authoritarian ruler. Article 62 of the new law summed up his intention to summarily nationalize the property of the Orthodox church:

“Religious facilities and land used by religious communities in the territory of Montenegro that were built or obtained from the public revenue of the state or were state-owned until December 1, 1918, and for which there is no evidence of religious property

rights, as the cultural heritage of Montenegro, are state property. Religious facilities that were built on the territory of Montenegro through joint ventures of citizens until December 1, 1918, and for which there is no evidence of property rights, as the cultural heritage of Montenegro, are state property. With respect to the existence of evidence of the facts of paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article, the means of proof and rules of proof shall be applied in accordance with the Law on Administrative Procedure and subsidiary with the Law on Civil Procedure”.

Article 63 was no better:

“The administrative body competent for property affairs shall, within one year from the day this Law enters into force, identify religious facilities and land that are state property ... the administrative body shall, without delay, inform the religious community that uses the facilities and land referred to ... the religious community shall continue to use the facilities and land subject to registration until the decision of the state body competent to decide on the possession, use and disposal of these facilities and land.”

The Orthodox church in Montenegro was thereby faced with losing its age-old assets, its legal status and its legal protection before the law against any of this, i.e. it was faced with extinction.

This summary decision provoked an eruption of unhappiness on the part of Orthodox believers but also members of other churches and national communities in Montenegro. Montenegro's Orthodox Council of Bishops appealed to Djukanovic not to impose this law. The eparchates of the Serbian orthodox church in Montenegro, in protest at the political decision made at Orthodox expense, organized faith processions in Montenegro's towns and larger locations under the slogan of 'We won't give up our shrines.' Political speeches and statements were kept off the marchers' agenda. Unprecedented events suddenly began taking place. Montenegro's population, until then mostly passive about religion, rediscovered its soul in remarkable fashion. Throughout the tiny country, whether by day or night, tens of thousands of people, young and old, would turn up to participate in each peaceful day and night procession. Most of the population became involved, twice a week for several months, with candles, torches and religious icons at their head.

Djukanovic had inadvertently awakened the latent religious feelings of the people, who completely opposed his state capture of their age-old church. These manifestations only ceased during periods of Covid-19 lockdown.

It was in this atmosphere that parliamentary elections were held on 30th August 2020. After thirty years of continuous rule, and despite the numerous election manipulations including invalid voting that had done so much for him in the past, Djukanovic's DPS was finally defeated, albeit only just. The involvement of the Church against the injustice it was facing had according to all accounts been crucial. Metropolitan Amfilohije had called on the citizens to take part in the elections, essentially to vote against the ruling nomenklatura of Djukanovic. He had himself voted for the first time at the age of nearly 82. Popular dissatisfaction with the government and its support for the church in its hour of need was so extensive that voter turnout was 78% – enough to thwart the decades-old electoral engineering by which Djukanovic had until then ensured his untrammelled rule. Though there was only one seat between the two blocs, and though he still remains president, Djukanovic's opponents now have the right to form the new government. The new coalition with the support of the Serbian Orthodox church in Montenegro, has committed to continuing Montenegro's pro-EU path and NATO membership. It has called on leaders of minority parties, mostly Bosniak and Albanian, to enter the government. The battle against corruption will be high on the agenda. But with the pro-western head of the coalition a Christian Democratic-oriented academic, Professor Zdravko Krivokapic, as the new majority's candidate for prime minister, one thing seems certain: the destruction of the Christian Serbian Orthodox church in Montenegro, as variously envisaged by communists and autocrats alike, will not be allowed to go forward.

Postscript

Last month saw the passing of a key figure in the Montenegrin Metropolitanate's defence of the Orthodox church. The life of Metropolitan Amfilohije encapsulated the battle to save the church in Montenegro from the deprivations of the communists and their successors. A man of great erudition, educated at western universities, versed in Latin and Greek, he spoke and wrote in several modern European languages, publishing a large number of books on theology and philosophy. Essays, translations and poetry were also within his orbit of interest. In 1990, following many years of resistance to communist rule, Metropolitan Amfilohije had been enthroned in Cetinje at a very difficult time for

the church. Half a century of communism had left Montenegro a spiritual wasteland. He had to practically start from the beginning, restoring the monasteries and the churches, appointing priests and bringing the people back to authentic Christian values. Amfilohije renewed the work of the seminary at Cetinje; he founded the publishing and informational institution of 'Svetigora'; both of which then played an invaluable role in the spiritual and educational renewal of Montenegro. He commenced the restoration of church choirs and spiritual centres. Social and charity activities flowered in his time. His charisma as an authentic Christian monk and the love he bestowed on others earned him huge respect both in Montenegro and in the Orthodox church as a whole. Denied and defamed by his opponents as a Serbian nationalist, his response was that he 'was not concerned about Serbianness or Montenegrin-ness, being a Christian bishop.' Metropolitan Amfilohije went to our Lord on 30th October 2020 in his eighty-second year. His funeral at the Cathedral of Christ's Resurrection in Podgorica was attended by Serbian Patriarch Irinej, bishops and priests. During his funeral tens of thousands of his spiritual disciples prayed to him in the deep conviction of the saintliness of his life and mission. His named successor on the throne at Cetinje, until a new Metropolitan of Montenegro ('of the mountains and the littoral') is appointed, is the Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic, Joanikije, his closest associate and collaborator over the last thirty years.

Many events have this year marked the ecclesiastical and political life of Montenegro and without doubt many challenges lie ahead for the new government and its premier. They lie ahead also for the fullness of Christ's church in Montenegro, in its defence of faith and freedom.

A New Orthodox Church in Durham

ANDREW LOUTH

Spaces and Places

THE BIBLE begins and ends with two contrasting images of place: the Garden and the City: 'And God planted a garden [paradise] towards the East, in Eden' (Gen. 2: 8) and 'And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven' (Apoc. 21: 2). In between, there are two other images of place in relation to which the life of the people of God is played out: the desert or wilderness, where the people of Israel spent forty years after the Exodus from Egypt, and the Temple in Jerusalem, where God had placed his Name, where he chose to make his Name to dwell there (Deut. 12: 5, 11). These two images—the desert and the temple—evoke very different conditions: the desert is somewhere in which you wander and have no place to call your own; the temple in the city is, in contrast, very much a place where you belong, which you can call your own. Both these images were important to early Christians. The second-century *Epistle to Diognetus*, inspired no doubt by the account of Abraham in Hebrews (11: 9–10), living in a tent in a land where he felt a foreigner, as he 'looked forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God', spoke of his fellow-Christians as 'living in their own countries, but as foreigners; sharing in everything as citizens, but enduring everything as aliens; every foreign country theirs, and every country foreign' (*Ep. Diog.* 5. 5). This radical sense of not being at home they combined with devotion to the Temple, as the place where God and humans met: an image that the so-called *Protevangelium* [or, Gospel prequel] of *James* sees fulfilled in Mary, the Mother of God, the human being in whom God chose to dwell. As soon as Christians ceased to be persecuted (or even before), they began to build churches, of increasing splendour, the archetype of such buildings for what was to become the Orthodox East being the Great Church of Holy Wisdom, *Hagia Sophia*, in New Rome, Constantinople... Istanbul.

Between the Desert and the Temple

These two poles of Christian existence—the desert where no one can be at home, or the foreign country, and the Temple, whether figurative or real—are



as important to what it means to be a Christian now as ever. So, though our Orthodox community in Durham is looking forward eagerly to having its own church, we need to be mindful of the years—24 years now—when we had no place of our own, no possibility of settling down, no chance of feeling comfortably at home in our own place. For ‘here we have no abiding city, but we seek one to come’, to cite Hebrews again (13: 14). It is good to have had the experience of not being able to settle down: an experience rarely granted to Christians in the West (as we are, too). Not that our experience has been that of strangers and aliens, shunned by others; on the contrary, it has been for us a time when we have had to depend on the generosity of others, especially, in our case, the Anglicans, who have been more than willing to make a space available to us to worship—a ‘time of gifts’. Now, as the chance of our own church, our own place, seems on the threshold, we should first of all be grateful for the blessings we have found as we sought to come together to worship in our own way in Durham. With our own church, our presence in Durham will be more obvious; we shall be able to point to the church that is ours, to which we shall be able to welcome people: there we shall continue a tradition of worship that speaks unmistakably of continuity with Christians of the past, in all the coun-

tries from which we have come—Greece, Romania, Russia, Bulgaria—and in the country where we find ourselves now.

Orthodox in the North-East of England?

Continuity of faith and worship with Christians *here*: how come? How is that so? From the beginning, when we sought the blessing of the then Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Thyateira, the ever-remembered servant of God Gregorios, we asked that our community should be called after the great saints, whose relics repose in the cathedral of Durham: St Cuthbert, monk and abbot, and then bishop, of Lindisfarne, and St Bede, monk of Jarrow-Monkwearmouth, from whom we learn almost all we know about that remarkable period in the seventh and eight centuries, when the Christian faith burned like a beacon in this part of the British Isles, this ‘remote corner of the earth’ (*extremus mundi angulus*), as Bede called it. Our request was readily granted. Why do we feel affinity with these great Celtic and Anglo-Saxon saints? At what might be thought a trivial level, just look at the coffin of St Cuthbert, still surviving in the treasury of the Cathedral in a frail (though restored) state: the sides of the coffin have deeply scratched figures (originally coloured), which we immediately, from their faces and gestures, recognize as what we call icons. Icons and relics are for us objects of veneration: icons, instinct with the holiness of the saints depicted; relics, the earthly remains of saints, awaiting the Resurrection. We feel at home with these saints, even though in those days, Northumbria was at the Western limits of the old Roman Empire, whereas our traditions of worship as Orthodox were shaped in the Eastern regions of that empire, especially Jerusalem, by then under Islamic rule. For in those days there was no fundamental division in the faith professed from the Holy Land of Palestine to the Holy Island, Lindisfarne, the site of Cuthbert’s monastery. And it is that unity in the faith that we hope will be evoked by our visible presence in Durham. We are not here to proselytize, but to share with our neighbours, of all faiths and none, the tradition we have received; to share the treasures of our Orthodox Faith with those—especially our fellow Western Christians, Anglicans, Catholics, and Protestants—who feel drawn to them, whether out of curiosity, interest, or by a profoundly felt affinity. ‘Come and see!’

The Way Ahead

For nearly a quarter-of-a-century our once small, and still growing, Orthodox community has been here: in Durham, but drawing people from all over the North East, being a place where Orthodox—of any country or jurisdiction—visiting or moving to Durham, not least in connexion with the University, can feel at home. The church that we hope will soon be ours is ideal for our purposes, which is to be where we gather together in the same place—*epi to auto*, as the early Christians put it—to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and other services—and share in worship and communion. It has been not used as a place of Christian worship for now nearly a century; formerly a cemetery chapel, it stands some way up a hill in a graveyard close to the centre of Durham. We have already begun to restore it and make it a building, safe and sound: a place ‘where prayer has been valid’. There remains a legal process to be accomplished—a process in Anglican canon law—with which the Anglican authorities have been unfailingly helpful, and to whom we shall remain grateful. There is still some way to go—legal proceedings always take time; there is much to be done, and for that we need funds. We have already received encouraging support, beginning with the generosity of many in our congregation. Our plan is in three stages, and we are approaching the end of the first stage, which involves laying proper foundations, making the building structurally sound, and some rebuilding work. For the first stage, we have received invaluable support in terms of a very generous grant from the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs. We are deeply grateful for all the help we have received, now and in the future.

The Divine Liturgy—the Mass, Holy Communion—is often called the ‘Eucharist’, from a Greek word meaning ‘thanksgiving’. In this church we shall be able to gather, Sunday by Sunday, feast day by feast day, to make ‘eucharist’, to give thanks (in the words of the anaphora of St John Chrysostom) ‘for all the blessings that we have received, known and unknown, manifest and hidden’.

Book Reviews

PETER ANTHONY

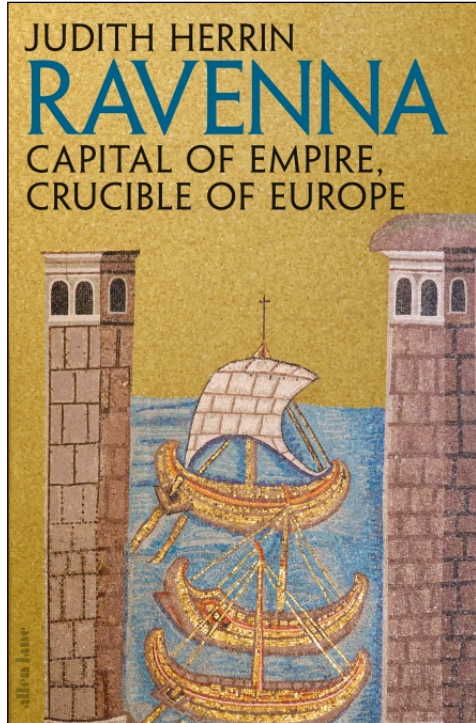
Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe, Judith Herrin. Allen Lane, 2020. 576 pp.

JUDITH HERRIN'S excellent new history of Ravenna accomplishes a useful and important task that nobody else has managed to do so far for the English-speaking world. She brings together in one fascinating narrative all the historical, theological, and artistic threads that make up the story of that great city, and presents them to us in a magnificent historical sweep.

Those who write about Ravenna tend to look at the city through the lens of the period or focus that interests them. Art historians concentrate on the mosaics, but sometimes fail to understand the intricacies of the theology prompting their creation, for example. Historians focus on specific incidents, personalities or events, but all too often ignore the power of the city's artistic riches.

Theologians discuss schisms and councils, but underestimate the realpolitik behind them of secular political power. Many histories of Ravenna also focus on the magnificent accomplishments of the Sixth Century, which saw the creation of its greatest treasures and most beautiful churches, but are less interested in later centuries.

Herrin's considerable accomplishment is to avoid any of these traps, and to bring together a synopsis of Ravenna's extraordinary history, influence and cultural significance in the late antique and early medieval period. It perhaps



lacks the detail and focus one might expect from an in-depth analysis of a particular individual or single event, but I think that's the point. The intention is to give us a broad sense of Ravenna's significance over several centuries and to show where the city fits into the wider contours of European and Middle Eastern history in a period often overlooked or undervalued in our cultural consciousness.

Indeed, the title one uses to describe this period of history is, in fact, part of Herrin's general argument. All too often Ravenna's glory days are seen as taking place in the tail end of "Antiquity." This inevitably brings the value judgement of it being a time of decline or a retreat from a greater cultural peak. Others see in Ravenna an early glimmering of medieval society, but inevitably not as well developed or sophisticated as the High Middle Ages to which it is unfavourably compared. Herrin argues we should see the period in which Ravenna flowers as an entity in itself, and uses the phrase "early Christendom" rather than "late antiquity." She convincingly proposes that what we witness in Ravenna is the emergence of something new and individual, a sophisticated and vibrant culture at a time of complex change and swift development, which should be seen in its own right.

The city comes to significance in the early fifth Century, when the capital of the Western Empire in Italy is moved from Rome to Milan, and then to Ravenna on the eastern coast of the Italian peninsula in the wake of Visigothic invasion. Surrounded by marshes, it was an easily defensible city with good access to the sea and connections to the rest of the Mediterranean world.

Through the study of this one city, however, we see a number of bigger and broader questions arise: the character and emergence of the European city; shifts of influence between East and West; the coming together of Christian culture with secular power; the migrations that still influence the ethnic make up of modern Western Europe; and the patterns of Mediterranean trade and exchange which continue to characterise our economies to this day.

Herrin presents Ravenna to us as a crucible, a place where power struggles and theological arguments from the wider Mediterranean world are played out. Ravenna is first the capital of the Western Empire, then the centre of the Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy, then the fulcrum of power for the Byzantine Exarchate of Italy, and finally the seat of Lombard control. The period she describes sees many of the great ecumenical councils, involves Christianity's most famous saints and personalities, and its most formative theological arguments. However, it is fascinating that the golden age of church and mosaic building in the Sixth Century is merely one century out of the five that Herrin

presents to us. Some of the most enlightening portions of her history are in the later centuries leading up to Charlemagne, which I knew far less about than the earlier period of Galla Placidia, Theodoric and Justinian.

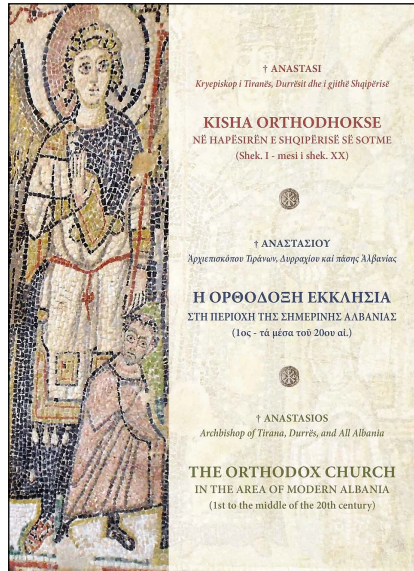
Herrin also succeeds in frustrating many of our presuppositions and prejudices about “Dark” Age culture. The reign of the Arian Ostrogoth King Theodoric, far from being a benighted period of brutal barbarianism, is revealed to be a sophisticated age of cultural toleration as Arians and Orthodox Catholics lived side by side in Ravenna under relatively functional Byzantine suzerainty.

Our modern historical and ecclesial minds perceive Christendom to be divided between Greek East and Latin West. What we witness in this history of Ravenna is a period in which that division doesn’t make sense. Ravenna is deeply connected to a Mediterranean world in which many shared religious assumptions, cultural norms, and economic ties linked the peoples who inhabited it. It was a swiftly changing age, threatened from the outside by Persian and Islamic forces in the East and “barbarian” invasion from the North. But in that change and development, we see emerge in Ravenna an extraordinary prototype for what Herrin describes as the first truly European City.

DIMITRIS SALAPATAS

The Orthodox Church in The Area of Modern Albania (1st to the middle of the 20th century), Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania. Ngjallja Publishing House, 2019. 187 pp. 10 €.

THIS BOOK, written by His Eminence Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durres and All Albania, is a great introduction to the ecclesiastical history and art of this important and ancient land. Written in Albanian, Greek and English, one can see that this book aims to attract a wide readership, promoting the riches and history of this Church to the world. The pictures of churches, icons, ancient ruins and mosaics and artefacts, enrich this publication.



Archbishop Anastasios first of all examines the historical and spiritual tradition one finds in Albania. He discerns five chronological periods, namely:

1. The first period is from Apostolic times to 731 AD, when this region was subordinate to the self-governing Church of East Illyricum, under the Roman Vicariate of Thessaloniki.
2. The second period extends from 731 AD to the eleventh century; the region was subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.
3. The third period runs from the eleventh century to 1767; most of the Sees were subject to the Autocephalous Archbishopric of Ochrid.
4. The fourth period extends from 1767 to 1937; the region was subject to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.
5. In the last period from 1937 onwards, the Church of Albania is autocephalous.¹

However, when examining the second part of this book, entitled: Art in the Orthodox Church of Albania, the author wishes to separate the timeline differently:

1. The Early Christian period, from the fourth to the eighth century.
2. The Byzantine period, from the mid-eighth century to the fifteenth century.
3. The third period covers the post-Byzantine era and Turkish occupation (1501-1912).²

References to modern day Albania are to be found in the Bible, where St Paul records: 'so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.' (Romans 15:18-19). Illyricum being a province of Macedonia, we also see further references: 'Yea, so have I striven to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation' (Romans 15:20). Therefore, we see that it was either Apostle Paul himself or one of his disciples who 'first planted the seeds of the Gospel in the

¹ Anastasios, *The Orthodox Church in the Area of Modern Albania*, pp.125-126.

² Ibid. p. 155.

geographical region of Albania.³ Titus also worked in that area, together with Caesar, who was one of the seventy Apostles.

What is evident in this book is that Albania 'is drenched in the blood of saints.'⁴ Names of many Bishops, Saints and Martyrs are evident here, showing that this Church has had a troubled and long history, from the Apostolic times until today. One famous saint from this region, especially for those interested in Byzantine Music is Byzantine musician St John Koukouzelis, who later moved to Mount Athos. Also, each period shows how the Church in Albania has been under many jurisdictions, including Rome, Constantinople, Ochrid and many more; therefore, showing a great diversity, which is evident in historical manuscripts, iconography and ecclesiastical architecture due to the constant changing of hands.

One problem for Albania and the Church in Albania was the continual conversion to Islam, during the Ottoman rule. According to Archbishop Anastasios, 'It was the Albanian population that was most vulnerable to Islam, one reason being that there was a lack of Christian literature in the native Albanian tongue.' One could argue that the lack of Christian literature in the native language might still be an issue, which is slowly being resolved with new publications by the Church.⁵ Additionally, to support the Orthodox faithful new monasteries were being established in the country. Many priests worked hard to support the Orthodox faith and population in the region by establishing churches and schools.

Crypto-Christians also existed in Albania, to avoid any forced Islamisation, whilst maintaining their identity to the best of their abilities. This is a practice found in many regions of the Ottoman Empire, where Orthodox faithful would appear in public with Muslim names and behaved like Muslims; however, at home and with their family they would keep their Orthodox traditions. Despite this being the practice of many, there were still faithful Orthodox who were martyred during this epoch. Unfortunately, this is a tradition still alive today in a number of Muslim countries.

During the 18th and 19th centuries there were serious endeavours to translate the Holy Bible into Albanian. Gregory Konstantinides, Bishop of Dyrrachion, translated the Old and New Testament using an Albanian alphabet

³ Ibid. p. 126.

⁴ Ibid. p. 131.

⁵ A good example of this is to be found in the Orthodox Online Shop: <https://www.orthodoxonlineshop.com/>, accessed 06/08/20, 16.59.

that he invented. On the other hand, Gregory Argyrokastrites, Bishop of Euboia, published the New Testament in Albanian, whilst using the Greek alphabet. Later translations were completed in the local dialects found in Albania.

New opportunities and responsibilities were introduced with the creation of the Albanian state (1912). 'The coming of political independence brought repeated demands that all religious communities be independent of their religious centres in other countries.'⁶ This led to The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania being declared autocephalous primarily by the Congress of Berat (1922). In 1929 the holy Synod was created. This of course was an uncanonical action and therefore the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not accept these developments. Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Patriarchate did allow self-administration and the use of the Albanian language in worship, preaching and in ecclesiastical education. The granting of canonical Autocephalous status was eventually achieved in 1937, during the tenure of Ecumenical Patriarch Benjamin I.

One main problem the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania had to deal with after 1944 was Communism and the religious persecution. In 1967 Albania proclaimed itself an atheist state, being the only country in the world and in history which proclaimed itself as such. Hierarchs, priests and the faithful were persecuted for their faith; churches and monasteries were closed down, destroyed or used for a number of purposes. Thankfully, in 1990 the government in Albania decided to relax the measures against religion, largely because of international pressure.

The second part of the book: Art in the Orthodox Church of Albania, shows the great work done by the local population in regards to architecture (churches, monasteries and schools), mosaics, miniatures, icon-painting, and artefacts. All of these demonstrate the importance of Orthodoxy in Albania and also how Orthodoxy has been embraced and cultivated in this Balkan state.

What would enrich this publication further would be the further examination of the ecclesiastical history of the Church of Albania to this day, especially after 1990, when Archbishop Anastasios became head of the local Church, resurrecting it again, after it was completely dismantled for 23 years. Moreover, it would be interesting to see where the Church of Albania sees itself in the future. What does it wish to accomplish and how? Interestingly enough, the author highlights the fact that the local Church

⁶ Anastasios, *The Orthodox Church in the Area of Modern Albania*, p.145.

invests a lively interest in the study, recording and restoration of the surviving Orthodox monuments. Many many churches and monasteries, often in lovely mountain regions, with a wealth of wall-paintings threatened by time and adverse weather conditions, are waiting for people to study and restore them.⁷

This call for research and support should be taken seriously from whoever is interested in Orthodoxy, in Christianity, in iconography, in architecture, in Church history and in preserving the riches of the past. Many research projects could flourish from this on the ground research in Albania, which would support the local Church to restore and preserve its riches. These are important works for not only the Balkan and European region, but for Christianity as a whole.

⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

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Interior of Hayia Sophia. Credit: Dimitris Salapatas.