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# MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE CONTEXT OF BALKAN AND EUROPEAN ORTHODOXY

By Gjoko Gjorgjevski

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the recent history and actual position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archbishopric of Ohrid (MOC-AO), which is still not accepted by the Balkan Orthodox churches. The relation between nation and church is also examined, recognizing it as one of the causes of the present situation of the MOC. The nature of this topic dictates to use and transmits various opinions and statements of prominent Orthodox leaders, scholars and theologians.

Key words: Macedonian Orthodox Church, nation, ethnophyletism, autocephaly

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed literature on this topic see – in Slavic languages: Славко Димевски, *Црковна историја на македонскиот народ*, Скопје 1965 [Slavko Dimevski, *Church History of the Macedonian People*, Skopje 1965]; Славко Димевски, *Историја на Македонската православна црква*, Скопје 1989 [Slavko Dimevski, *History of the Macedonian Orthodox Church*, Skopje 1989]; Доне Илиевски, *Автокефалноста на Македонската православна црква*, Скопје 1972 [Done Ilievski, *Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church*, Skopje 1972]; Илија К. Марку, *Македонска црква – Самотворевина Скопља. Улога Пана и Уније*, Призрен 1994 [Илија К. Марку, *Macedonian Church – Self-creation of Skopje. The Role of the Pope and Union*, Prizren 1994]; Миодраг Перик, *Историско-правните аспекти на односите помеѓу Српската православна црква и Македонската православна црква*, Скопје 1998 [Miodrag Perić, *Historical-Legal Aspects of the Relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Macedonian Orthodox Church*, Skopje 1998]; Предраг Пузовиќ, *Раскол у Српској православној цркви – Македонско црквено питање*, Београд 1997 [Predrag Puzović, *Schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church – Macedonian Church Issue*, Belgrade 1997]; Ђоко Слијепчевиќ, *Македонско црквено питање*, Минхен, 1960 [Gjoko Slijepchevic, *Macedonian Church Issue*, Munich, 1960]; Александар Трајановски, *Бугарската егзархија и македонското националноослободително движење (1893–1908)*, Скопје 1982 [Aleksandar Trajanovski, *The Bulgarian Exarchate and the Macedonian National Liberation Movement (1893–1908)*, Skopje 1982]; Александар Трајановски, *Црковната организација во Македонија и движењето за возобновување на Охридската архиепископија од крајот на XVIII и во текот на XIX век – до основањето на ВМРО*, Скопје 2001 [Aleksandar Trajanovski, *Church Organization in Macedonia and the Movement for Restoration of Ohrid Archbishopric from the end of the XVIII century and during the XIX– until the establishment of VMRO*, Skopje 2001]. Михаил Витальевич Шкаровский, “Создание Македонской

## A Brief History of Orthodox Christianity in Macedonia<sup>1</sup>

Christian life in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia was continuously present since early Christian times. Since the first centuries, there have been Christian centers with bishop's seats: Stobi, Heraclea, Bargala, Skupi, and others. In the ninth century, the most prominent among the disciples of St. Cyril and Methodius, the brothers who created a Slavic alphabet, were St. Clement and St. Naum of Ohrid, who have continued their missionary activities in Ohrid. Naum, who was a monk, retreated to the south shore of the Ohrid Lake, where he built a monastery and formed a brotherhood; he is considered the founding father of the monasticism in Macedonia. St. Clement, instead, established a well-organized school in Ohrid, where in seven years, 3500 students were educated. Later, he was appointed bishop of the Dremvica and Velika Diocese, the territory around the Ohrid Lake. This diocese soon grew into the Ohrid Archbishopric. This Church of Ohrid, as autocephalous, held jurisdiction over various territories during different periods, sometimes even from the Danube and Dalmatia to the Black Sea and Sicilia, but the seat was always in Ohrid, in the territory of Macedonia. Exactly 250 years ago, in 1767, the Ottoman administration abolished the Ohrid Archbishopric and its dioceses were given to the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. With its abolition, the Archbishopric of Ohrid provoked a

Православной Церкви в период оккупации республики и первые послевоенные годы”, *Вестник ПСТГУ II. История . История Руской Православной Церкви*, II:3 32 (2009) 116-138. In other languages: Eastern Cristianity and Politics in the Twenty First Century, ed. Lucian. N. Leustean, New York 2014; Ivan Iveković, “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: The Politization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam” in *Yugoslav Successor States, Social Compas* 49(4), 2002, 523–536; Aleksandar Panev, *Orthodoxy, Modernity and Nationality in Macedonia, 1800-* A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Dept. of History, University of Toronto; Ramet Pedro, *Autocephaly and National Identity in Church-State Relations in Eastern Christianity: An Introduction*, in: *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Durham 1988; Victor Roudometof, “Nationalism, Globalization, Eastern Orthodoxy. ‘Unthinking’ the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ in Southeastern Europe”, in *European Journal of Social Theory* 2:2, 1999; Charles Wegener Sanderson, *Autocephaly as a Function of Institutional Stability and Organizational Change in the Eastern Orthodox Church*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Government and Politics, 2005; Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey*, Rome 1999; Jure Zečević-Božić, *Die Autokephalieerklärung der Mazedonischen Orthodoxen Kirche*, Würzburg 1994.

deep impact not only on the ecclesiastical, but also on the civic history of that area, because, for centuries, it was positioned between the most important institutions which left a strong imprint on the history and the destiny of the population on the Balkans,. As stated by Ivan Snegarov, “the history of the Church of Ohrid is a history of eight centuries of spiritual independence, I would say, of the spiritual sovereignty of Macedonia. The autonomous spirit of Macedonia is not new, but was a product of its historical life. It was developed by the autocephalous church of Ohrid.”<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, under international pressure, allowed the national Orthodox churches of neighboring Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia to work in various parts of Macedonia. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and during World War I, the territory of present-day Macedonia came under Bulgarian rule; after the war, in 1920, it became a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia wherein the renewed Serbian Orthodox Church took on the dioceses in this part of Macedonia. This state of affairs lasted until 1941, when, after the beginning of the World War II, the Serbian hierarchy left Macedonia and the people and Bulgaria established the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church in the eastern part<sup>3</sup>, while a small part of western Macedonia fell under the jurisdiction of the Albanian Orthodox Church. These forced changes of foreign church jurisdiction provoked a revolt among the people and the native clergy, who decided not to ever allow a church administration which is not of the Macedonian people. In 1943, on the first liberated territory in Debarca, near Ohrid, at the Assembly held by the priests from that region, as well as at the Clergy-Laity Council held in 1945 in Skopje, a renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric and an independent church were demanded.

<sup>2</sup> Иван Снегаров, *История на Охридската архиепископия-патриаршия*, т. 2, София 1995, VI [Ivan Snegarov, *History of the Archbishopric of Ohrid*, II, Sofia 1995, VI].

<sup>3</sup> The presence of the Bulgarian Church is permanent in the country since its foundation in 1872, except the period between the two world wars, when its clergy was forced to leave the territory of present-day Republic of Macedonia. The Bulgarian Exarchate was promulgated unilaterally; later in the same year from the Ecumenical Patriarchate it was officially condemned by the Council in Constantinople as schismatic. The Orthodox Church in Bulgaria was recognized only in 1945 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as autocephalous.

At the Clergy-Laity Assembly held in Ohrid in October 1958 (attended by priests, monks, and faithful people), the Ohrid Archbishopric in the form of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was renewed and Bishop Dositej, vicar of the Serbian Patriarch, was elected the first Head of the Church. The name “Macedonian Orthodox Church” was taken following the example of the other Orthodox churches. Immediately after this decision for the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric, the Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church, held in July 1959, concluded that the dioceses in the People's Republic of Macedonia had established an independent church and the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church was no longer valid for those dioceses and for their bishops. In July 1959, the Serbian Patriarch German visited Skopje and, together with Archbishop Dositej, ordained a second bishop for Macedonia, Clement, Metropolitan of Prespa and Bitola. In May 1962, accompanied by Patriarch German and other representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexis of Moscow visited Macedonia.

In the period that followed, mutual understanding was missing: the Serbian Orthodox Church insisted on an autonomous status of the MOC, while the Macedonian Orthodox Church demanded complete independence, i.e. autocephaly. Thus, in 1967, at the Clergy-Laity Assembly in Ohrid, the attendees voted to renew the Ohrid Archbishopric as an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church.

With the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric as the church of Macedonian people in the country and abroad, it started with organizing its church life, to establish its own educational institutions—a Seminary and a Faculty, and to renew the monastic life. However, the opposition of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the new reality officially isolated the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the other Orthodox churches. For all the subsequent efforts to gain recognition, the autocephaly of the Macedonian Church is not yet recognized by other Orthodox churches in

defense of Serbian opposition. Therefore, the Macedonian Orthodox Church has constantly attempted to overcome this state of affairs. In these 45 years, commissions from both churches have met many times, but after all the meetings and discussions, no solution has been reached, neither for its status, nor for its name, which appears one of the biggest obstacles from the side of the Greek Orthodox Churches. It is evident that this situation is further complicated by the contemporary political situation in which Macedonia found itself, most of all, the non-recognition of the name of the country.

After the several meetings at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, in 2002 in the Serbian city of Niš, Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Church officials met to discuss the status of the Macedonian Church. The Macedonian side was asked to sign an agreement that would downgrade the Macedonian Church to an autonomous body within the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Church would be renamed the Archbishopric of Ohrid. This proposal was unanimously rejected by the Macedonian Synod and the Macedonian people. But, one of the bishops of MOC, Metropolitan Jovan (Vranishkovski) of Povardarie,<sup>4</sup> had crossed over to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which used his departure to appoint him as “exarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Macedonia” (at that time, Jovan was already accused in Macedonia for canonical offences and criminal activities). With a decision of the Archierarchs’ Bishops’ Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church on 24 May 2003, a parallel Synod of the Serbian Church for Macedonia was formed, led by Jovan, with the election of two new bishops, one of them being only 25 years of age. The Serbian Orthodox Church in

<sup>4</sup> At 24.06.1998, by the Decision of the Holy Bishops’ Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church Jovan (Vraniskovski) was elected for a vicar of the Diocese of Prespa and Pelagonija with the title bishop of Dremvica. Since 08.03.2000 he became Administrator of the Diocese of Bregalnica. Few mounts later, at 15.11.2000, he was removed as the administrator of Bregalnica and appointed to the Diocese of Povardarie. In June 2002 he left the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Macedonia (“Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid” - OAO) is still not registered in Macedonia as a religious community nor does it have legal status.<sup>5</sup>

In 2004, the Macedonian Parliament adopted a declaration that supported the Macedonian Orthodox Church, all efforts and decisions made by the Macedonian Synod, as well as its commitment to preserving its integrity, significant status, and role in the social life of the country.

On November 2009, the Macedonian Orthodox Church at its regular Clergy-Laity Assembly, changed the Constitution and added to its name the title “Archbishopric of Ohrid” with the Church being officially titled “Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archbishopric of Ohrid.”

### **National Identity as a Stumbling Block for Balkan and Macedonian Orthodoxy**

The joyous message of salvation, carried by Apostle Paul, rapidly reached Europe. This was not a coincidence. He was invited by a European, who begged him to “come over to Macedonia” and help him and his people (Acts, 16:9); it was a vision that revealed a new reality, a vision that has given direction to the course of Christianity. Paul’s first step in the Balkans marked the beginning of Christianity in Europe. Centuries later, Christian Balkans took a new physiognomy by the arrival of Slavs. However, the Orthodox people of all of Southeast Europe would share the same or similar destiny for a long period of time, first being within Byzantium, and then following a few centuries of joint life in the Ottoman Empire. Since that time, numerous spiritual and cultural treasures were handed down to us as an inheritance. The small churches and monasteries became centers and spiritual hearths. Most of them, built during various periods,

<sup>5</sup> According to the present Law on the Legal Status of a Church, Religious Community and a Religious Group, art. 10: “The name and official insignia of each new church, religious community and religious group shall be different

have been completely preserved up to today. Apart from the valuable fresco painting, due to which the Balkan schools are renowned in the world, the monasteries hid in their ancient treasuries invisible records of the spiritual code of the monastic struggle that took place in there. So, this part of Europe, the Balkans, possesses a huge common spiritual and cultural inheritance—although, most often, it is not about huge deeds and constructions, which do not decrease their value at all. As a poet recorded: in the past, maybe we had no colossal churches, but from our soul, we have created a dwelling for God; now, we are building magnificent temples, but our souls appear to remain vain...

All of these challenges introduce us to the periods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when most Balkan peoples succeeded to become free and to establish their own states. This allowed them to organize themselves regarding the church as well, and to establish their own independent churches with emphasized national character. But these alterations seemed to also influence the Orthodox cohesion, and Orthodox unity and unanimity, darkening the image of the universal character of the Church and its ecumenical mission. Has national reductionism narrowed the role of the Church to a mere identification with the nation and the national interest? How could we define “ethnophiletism,” condemned by the Church, but usually used as an argument by the “mother” churches, disappointed, unsatisfied (but also angry) by the self-initiated departure of the “daughter” churches?

For the Patriarchate of Constantinople, ethnophyletism is devastating and catastrophic, especially for the Balkan area. At the official page of the Patriarchate remains that ethnophyletism is “a product of the Enlightenment and the French revolution. It was a new political theory, on the basis of which were created the nation states of Europe, and, in particular, those of the Balkan Peninsula.” In that sense, the “states were now formed according to this from the names and official insignia of already registered churches, religious communities and religious groups.”



dominant theory, on the basis of ethnophyletic criteria—either those already in existence or, mainly, those invented by means of politics or propaganda” (it is an interesting observation, because nowadays some of those nation are firmly claiming the same for the smaller neighboring nations, including Macedonia). It is noted that “this theory is, alas, still being applied in the Balkans today, with its familiar disastrous consequences on the lives of the people of the region and on peace.” Consequently, one of the “most significant points of evolution” was “the creation of national churches which, for a certain time were alienated from each other.” Conforming to this statement, all Balkan churches were projects of foreign propaganda: “Those who were informed by this spirit of ethnophyletism collaborated with foreign political powers and were moved to declare the arbitrary autocephaly of churches in Greece (1833), Romania (1865), Bulgaria (1870) and Albania (1922-1928-1937).” Subsequently, the Ecumenical Patriarchate adopted a position against this phenomenon. “Initially, it censured the Greeks (1833-1850) and then, at the Great Local Synod in Constantinople (1872), went on to condemn ethnophyletism, which was not merely a deviation from the healthy love of one’s nation and state, but constitutes a real impediment to cooperation between local Orthodox Churches in the world and is the greatest enemy to the unity of the Church.”<sup>6</sup> According to these words, the ethnophyletism in the national churches is not a phenomenon of the past, but it is a present danger that is hurting the unity of the Orthodox Church.

The problem of the relation of the nation and the church (especially) in the Balkans is still an inflammable issue to which different answers are given; however, it seems that often the

<sup>6</sup> Panteleimon Rodopoulos, “Territorial Jurisdiction According to Orthodox Canon Law. The Phenomenon of Ethnophyletism in Recent Years”, <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/territorial-jurisdiction-according-to-orthodox-canon-law-the-phenomenon-of-ethnophyletism-in-recent-yea-1>. The article is published also in *Territorialità e personalità nel diritto canonico: il diritto canonico di fronte al terzo millennio: atti dell' 11. Congresso internazionale di diritto canonico e del 15. congresso internazionale della società per il diritto delle chiese orientali*, Budapest 2-7 settembre 2001.ed. Peter Erdo - Peter Szabo.

theology and ecclesiology doesn't have the required position in directing and forming of the church attitudes and actions. What is the role of the national identity in the life of the Orthodox Church? Is it possible to separate national consciousness from religious belief?

According to Stefan Tzankov, "the nation may be a bearer of the good and bad, of the divine and of the demonic, of the virtue and of the sin, of the love and of the hate, of the harmony and of the discord. If it is the case of the latter, then the Church has in the nation an anti-Christian power which, just like an evil mother, wants to destroy and swallow her children, who considers herself to be something special, or a center and the biggest wealth of the world ... who operates the passions ... hatred, hostility ... the power which guides to self-conceit..."<sup>7</sup>

The link between the local church and the national identity is evident, especially by the Balkan Orthodox churches. And moreover, the church is often considered the protector of a nation or the ground for the state's unity and even its endurance. In the words of Patriarch Teoctist, "the history of Romanian people is intertwined with the history of the Orthodox Church, the only institution which has lasted since the birth of the [Romanian] people. Whoever denies that the church is the national church should deny the unitary character of the Romanian state."<sup>8</sup>

For the former Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church, Christodulos, the Church is also a guardian of the nation, when he says: "(The role of the Church is not and must not be in competition with the State). Preserving our national identity, the Church helps our State in self-understanding that is a factor of strength and spontaneity... Only here, in our country, the concern for the salvation of our distinctiveness is considered as anti-European, nationalistic,

<sup>7</sup> Стефан Цанков, „Црква и нација на православном Истоку“, *Хришћанство и политика*, Шабац 1998, 96-97 [Stefan Tzankov, "Church and Nation in the Orthodox East", *Christianity and Politics*, Šabac 1998, 96-97].

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy and the 'Twin Tolerations'" *Journal of Democracy* 11, 4 (2000): 39–40; Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, (Oxford: 2007), 30.

pessimistic, conservative, and many times criticized as being behind the times, or even a fascist plot. Nevertheless, here in our country the meaning of nation is all-powerful and has the strength to survive.”<sup>9</sup>

Analyzing the situation in their own churches, some scholars are realizing that “the Church in Greece seems unable to escape the syndrome of identifying with the nation. It is unable to see its work and its general historical course as distinct from the course of the nation. It also appears to remain unaware of the fact that this identification with the nation and national ideology has been imposed on the Church by the state, to serve the state's own purposes, which gradually have become the Church's purpose, too.”<sup>10</sup> The attempt of the Church to give its contribution to the “struggles of the nation,” in order to guard its exclusive relationship and symbiosis with the *ethnos* is also observed. “As the Greek state is gradually denationalized, as a result of the wider realignments due to globalization and multiculturalism, the Church in Greece is more emphatically nationalized, because of a growing sense of insecurity that results from the loss of the special legal relationship to the state and the exclusive relationship with the nation.”<sup>11</sup> It is a big challenge, but also a strong temptation for the Church.<sup>12</sup> But, on the other hand, it should be a

<sup>9</sup> Archbishop Christodoulos, „The Word and Role of Orthodoxy in the European Union“, 1/1/1999, [http://www.ecclesia.gr/english/archbishop/christodoulos\\_speeches.asp?cat\\_id=&id=485&what\\_main=3&what\\_sub=12&lang=en&archbishop\\_heading=Addresses/Speeches](http://www.ecclesia.gr/english/archbishop/christodoulos_speeches.asp?cat_id=&id=485&what_main=3&what_sub=12&lang=en&archbishop_heading=Addresses/Speeches)

<sup>10</sup> Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, „The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities“, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47, 1-4, 2002: 365. For the history of the adoption of the national ideology by the Church of Greece, see also C. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece (1821-1852)*, (Cambridge 1969). For a comparative study of this phenomenon in the Balkan countries, see P. Kitromilidis, “Imagined Communities' and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” in *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality*, ed. M. Veremis; (London and Athens, 1990), 51-60.

<sup>11</sup> A. Manitakis, *The Relations between the Church and the State-Nation in the Shadow of the Identity-Cards Conflict*, (Athens, 2000), 17.

<sup>12</sup> “Indeed, the temptations that Christ rejected in the wilderness appear acceptable to the institutional Church. There is a difference: instead of transforming stones into bread, the Church flirts with both: attempting to show that Macedonia is Greek, and organizing massive gatherings to demand the inclusion of religious denomination on identity cards.” Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, „The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” 367.

case of worry when theologians start to assert that the authentic nationalism is a God-given gift, which should be appreciated, because not all people derive from a true and authentic nation.<sup>13</sup>

In this context of strong religious-national liaison in the neighboring's counties, the Macedonian Orthodox Church appears as a restored Archbishopric of Ohrid, as was previously said, for the first time as an autonomous church within the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1958, and then by a decision of the Assembly in 1963 with proclaimed autocephaly. Both the first and the second acts remain suppressed and the situation is being ignored by the remaining Orthodox ecumena, deciding to leave it as an unsolved internal issue of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It could be said that this local Church follows the path to independence of the rest of the Balkans and other local churches, and it doesn't deviate from it, even in originally not being given permission for independence from the "mother-church" (virtually all of the national churches existed as autocephalous first and were recognized as such only "after the fact"). But, the main difference is that all other Balkan churches self-declared and achieved their independence from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which, although predominantly Greek, was composed of different nations and cultures, that probably permitted a decent equilibrium between them, while decades later, it appears that the Macedonian Orthodox Church, in an ambient of dense national concentration, that (as was realized in recent history) does not permit dignified space for different large national group of believers.

<sup>13</sup> Who respects his nation and firstly deals with the nation and proper commitment to the nation (as something given by God) and, of course, its quality of contributing to humanity--is nationalist. "Great America, enriched in wars but also through the efforts of its citizens... is proud of its hybrid national identity, and Serbia is hiding her faith and its organic nationalism during the most difficult moments. Partly on the basis of "guidelines" which come from the same America... Serbian nationalism is associated with Orthodoxy, with its evangelical roots of St. Sava. True Serbian nationalism is not hateful and exclusive but based on the meaning and purpose of the historical way of the nation. As obligation. On the common Testament."Ђакон Ненад Илић, "О Цркви и националном – америчка размишљања"[Deacon Nenad Ilic, "About the Church and National – American Considerations"], <https://stanjestvari.com/2016/03/04/ђакон-ненад-илић-о-цркви-и-националном/>

The national and state politics of some of the surrounding countries have deeply influenced the attitude of related churches in their strong opposition of the existence of one “Macedonian” church. Its problem is connected also to the problem of challenging its right to use the designation by which the state's and the nation's name is marked. For Orthodox believers, this attitude is difficult to understand, posing the questions: could a bad name exist for a church of God? Do evangelical and canonical bases exist upon which it is possible, from the position of the Church, to ask from the other to renounce his identity, even it is a national one? As a condition for acceptance, can being forced into national apostasy be defined as a struggle against the ethnophyletism or nationalism? Is it possible to identify some unusual “sinful” relationship between the church and the nation in Macedonia, which is very different from all other Orthodox churches and countries?

The connection with the Archbishopric of Ohrid is often placed in evidence in the context of restoration as the Macedonian Orthodox Church. As a historical argument, it has its own importance, but the historical evidence has much more weight. Also, non-Macedonian scholars and experts openly remember the role of foreign ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Macedonian territory for the purpose of implementation of a national-state policy.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, an experience of suffering by the political misuse of the church for the purpose of denationalization and assimilation in the past provides a comprehensible reason why almost all Macedonian people are rejecting the forced imposition of foreign ecclesiastical jurisdiction, which is understood by them as a return to the past and a submission to spiritual slavery.

<sup>14</sup> “The Macedonian population, deep in the twentieth century, had not yet a clear identity and often happens in a lot of villages to pass from one to another side, dependent to which church a priest belonged”. Миша Ђурковић, “Како се конструишу нације: црногорски случај”, *Социолошки преглед*, XLIV (1/2010) 11 [Misha Gjurkovic, “How to Construct Nations: Montenegrin Case”, *Sociological Review*, XLIV (1/2010) 11]. During the Second World War “a course was adopted for denationalization and assimilation, in which a significant role was assigned to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church”, Михаил Витальевич Шкаровский, “Создание Македонской Православной Церкви в период оккупации республики и первые послевоенные годы”, <http://www.bogoslov.ru/greek/text/457045.html>.

For this reason, one can understand and expect the failure of the creation of a parallel Serbian Church in Macedonia (“Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid” - OAO), which is almost unanimously rejected by Macedonian Orthodox believers. OAO, being tempted to seek support of foreign ecclesiastical and state politics, openly denies Macedonian identity, claiming it to be a political invention created by communists with the purpose of causing a “nationalistic schism” and therefore alleging that Macedonian history “was written based on the needs of the then-created state.”<sup>15</sup> The official head of OAO wrote: “We would not include as a reason here the providing national identity to the people of the newly-created Republic through the Church, because despite the fact that the Church, especially in the Balkan region, was the keeper of the national identity of some people, still, its role and meaning is not this.”<sup>16</sup> The call for “above-national consciousness” as a cover in the midst of strong nationalistic regions remained ineffective and the expectations for the Serbian Orthodox Church was in vain, when one takes into consideration that even the Serbian minority in Macedonia did not respond positively to this call. On several occasions, the officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed their expectation (or hope?) for dissolution of the actual state of Macedonia, which would then bring about the solution to the Macedonian ecclesiastical problem of the Orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “The claim that the church schism in the Republic of Macedonia has been caused by the nationalistic schism of the people who live on the territory of today’s Republic of Macedonia is quite probable. The communist government needed to create a history for the then People’s Republic of Macedonia after 1945. Yet, instead of building it based on documents and facts, it was written based on the needs of the then-created state ... To think that you are Slav and to use the name Macedonian is completely unfounded and immature”. Jovan (John) Vraniskovski, Metropolitan of Veles and Vardar Valley and Exarch of Ohrid, *For the Kingdom to Come*, Volume I, Ohrid 2005, 58-60,64.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 171-172.

<sup>17</sup> On the official site of Serbian Television the speech of Metropolitan Amfilohije is transmitted, who stated that “Macedonia is divided in Slavic and Albanian parts and it is a question how long the State could survive in that shape”. <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/2004476/zapad-unistava-jedinstvo-slovena.html>, Several years ago Minutes of a meeting from the Session of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church leaked. The authenticity of the document was never denied. In one part of the text is noticed, when bishop Irinej of Backa is talking about the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Macedonians:

“Their insanity is so great that they do not see that their issue is solved. One diplomat, not any diplomat, told me in confidence ..., - Listen, you have to negotiate with the Croats as you know and can, there will be no Bosnia and Macedonia. There is no – you are staying. The Croats stay, you should do something to have a little peace here, and

This is obviously not one of the brightest aspects of the Orthodox Church reality. Returning to the question of the nation and the church, particularly in the European and Balkan context, Metropolitan Michael (Staikos), says: "...The problem of nationalism, which has been condemned on the one hand, must also yet be conquered and neutralized. We are not able to speak—nor is it allowed for us to speak—about the harmonious co-existence of people in united Europe while simultaneously developing fanatic nationalistic tendencies and movements which create boundaries and disqualify and oppose the existence of other nations; and precisely because the Orthodox churches again and again are faced with this criticism, I wish to stress here, with strong emphasis, the official position of Orthodoxy concerning this point. From the Orthodox side, it needs to be said that, in the molding of a new Europe, the riches of traditions, civilizations, peoples, religions, and dogmas must be considered and held in respect as unity in diversity and pluralism."<sup>18</sup> According to John Zizoulas, if, in the political field, the peoples are accomplishing the uniting of Europe and [doing so] have largely succeed to overcome the nationalistic disputes of the past, then, in the field of the church, we need such overcoming even more, because of the very nature of the Orthodox Church.<sup>19</sup> The nation originated from the breakdown and fragmentation of human unity, while the Church eschatologically prepares and actualizes the path to unity. "The nation separates those who were initially united, while the Church unites those who were previously separated."<sup>20</sup>

these will not be. That did not tell me a Serb, but somebody from one country ...but the man is intelligent". *Minutes of the session of the Commission for the amendment of the Constitution of SOC*, April 10, 2014, <http://borbazaveru.info/content/view/6688/1/>

<sup>18</sup> Митрополит Михаил (Стакос), „Допринос православља кретању ка уједињеној Европи“, *Хришћанство и европске интеграције*, 323-324 [Metropolitan Michail (Staikos), "Contribution of Orthodoxy to the Movement to Unified Europe", *Christianity and European Integrations*, 323-324].

<sup>19</sup> Јован Зизулас, „Сведочење и служење православне жене у уједињеној Европи – претпоставке и могућности“, *Хришћанство и европске интеграције*, ед. Радован Биговић, (Београд 2003), 208 [John Zizioulas, "Witnessing and Serving of Orthodox Women in Unified Europe – Assumptions and Possibilities", *Christianity and European Integrations*, ed. Radovan Bigović, (Belgrade 2003), 208].

<sup>20</sup> Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, „The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities“, 374.

The Church should take seriously into account that its task is serving the people to serve God, that the faith is above-national, that the faith makes sense of the nation, and not vice versa. Included here is also the basic right for self-determination regarding the national or religious belonging. The words of the Archbishop Cristodoulos are very clear: (The Church) is obligated to support every attempt to protect diversification, the spread of discrimination, of xenophobia and violence in any form. It is obligated to present its ... unreserved acknowledgment of the other, respect for creation, the society of persons...<sup>21</sup> The acceptance of the other in the way he is, is the minimum which can be done relating to the respect and the dignity of the other. As the Albanian Archbishop Anastasios notes, “human dignity doesn't represent indefinite civil pride, but conviction that each person is a holy person, a creation of God. The dignity of the human is not connected to the egoistic, superior feeling of the individual, but to the feeling of his human dimension. It is about dignity, full of nobility and respect toward others.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archbishopric of Ohrid as self-governing and independent, is a half century lasting reality of Orthodoxy, that has been rejected and ignored, unwanted and wounded. It is not only a problem of the people of the Republic of Macedonia. Rather, it is an overlooked symptom of a present state of Orthodoxy, which does not offer a required witness in the modern world. Being hostile to a part of a proper religious community only because it is not politically acceptable, intending to gain some transitory political victory

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop Christodoulos, „The Word and Role of Orthodoxy in the European Union“, 1/1/1999, [http://www.ecclesia.gr/english/archbishop/christodoulos\\_speeches.asp?cat\\_id=&id=485&what\\_main=3&what\\_sub=12&lang=en&archbishop\\_heading=Addresses/Speeches](http://www.ecclesia.gr/english/archbishop/christodoulos_speeches.asp?cat_id=&id=485&what_main=3&what_sub=12&lang=en&archbishop_heading=Addresses/Speeches)

<sup>22</sup> Архиепископ Анастасије (Јанулатос), „Православље и права човека. Са освртом на Универзалну декларацију и грчко православно предање“, *Хришћанство и европске интеграције*, 237 [Archbishop Anastasios (Yannulatos), “Orthodoxy and Human Rights. With a review to the Universal Declaration and Greek Orthodox tradition“, *Christianity and European Integrations*, 237].



(religious conquest of territories or annihilation of somebody's identity), is deeply hurting the Body of Christ. Being indifferent for 50 years to the unanimous voice of almost all members of one local church in rejecting the foreign ecclesiastical jurisdiction (taking into consideration the still fresh memory of a painful experience of political misuse of non-domestic ecclesiastical governing in the recent history), is completely irresponsible. At present, the Orthodox ecclesiastical organization of the Balkans, surrounded by four autocephalous churches, the autocephaly for the Macedonian Orthodox Church is not an option, but a necessity. Instead of attempting to create internal divisions as provisory solutions, one should expect support for the unity in order to find a righteous, dignified, and brotherly Christian solution. Suitable advice should be found in the words of Fr. Thomas Hopko, who wrote: "when there is absolutely no justifiable reason before God and the dogmas and canons of the Holy Church, why it should exist merely as a part of some other church ... then this church not only may be an autocephalous church in the family of Orthodoxy, but it must be such a church, recognized and blessed by all others!"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://oca.org/questions/autocephaly/autocephaly-03>.