

AN APPALLING INCIDENT IN SWEDEN

By the Reverend Dr. Gregory Telepneff

In general, Orthodox scholarship in Scandinavia has always been limited in scope and has stood outside the theological mainstream. It is true that the Church of Finland, at least before its total fall to Westernization, produced a few theologians of note. Remnants of this period survive and, indeed, a number of Constantine Cavarnos' books have been recently published in Finnish, suggesting that there is still interest in traditional Orthodox scholarship. But the almost negligible Orthodox populations in Denmark and Norway and the small community of Orthodox in Sweden have produced virtually nothing in the way of remarkable scholarship in the area of Orthodox studies. Their few Churches are generally influenced either by the unbridled ecumenism and theological deviations of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which maintains an Exarchate in Stockholm, by a Russian émigré community that hearkens to the old "Paris School" (now under the Oecumenical Patriarchate) and its eccentric theology, or by the Serbian Church, which is just emerging from a period of ferocious inter-jurisdictional hatred in Western Europe occasioned by the Patriarchal and Free Serbian parties, which have now been reconciled by the able Patriarch Pavel. (For a brief discussion of the "Westernized" theology which preoccupies many would-be Orthodox scholars in general, see the introductory remarks in my paper [with Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna], "The Transformation of Hellenistic Thought on the Cosmos and Man in the Greek Fathers," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 9:2&3 [1990].)

When Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna, under whose *omophorion* I and my parish find ourselves, accepted a visiting professorship at the Theological Institute of Sweden's oldest university in Uppsala, some years ago, he returned to the U.S. with frightful stories of the coarse jurisdictional hatred among Orthodox in Sweden. Despite his reputation among Orthodox scholars in this country—a reputation which crosses jurisdictional lines—, he was in some instances so boorishly treated that one is left speechless. Moreover, he found nu-

FATHER GREGORY TELEPNEFF has taught early Christian art at the St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Seminary and early Church history and ancient Greek philosophy and Patristics at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, where he was a Newhall Teaching Fellow. A married Priest serving the St. John Chrysostomos Church in Colma, California, he is the author of numerous articles and books in Orthodox theology.

merous clergymen and scholars pretending to an expertise in Orthodox studies unjustified by their inadequate backgrounds and limited understanding of the Orthodox world. In such an atmosphere, with a small population of Orthodox believers distributed among the missions of some of the most unhealthy and innovative Orthodox Churches in the world, an appalling display of bigotry—passing itself off as “scholarship”—recently unfolded.

A Roman Catholic Docent at the Theological Institute of the State-sponsored University of Lund, in Southern Sweden, Gösta Hallonsten, recently published a book purporting to be an overview of the Eastern Churches in Sweden, *Östkyrkor i Sverige—en översikt*, published by Artos Publications in 1992 at Skellefteå. (The reader can find a summary of this book in a review written by a Swedish Lutheran Pastor that appears in the “Book Reviews” section of this issue of *Orthodox Tradition*.) Of special interest to me are Hallonsten’s attempts, at the expense of honest theology, to portray the non-Chalcedonian Oriental Christians as “pre-Chalcedonians,” avoiding the Eastern Orthodox terms for these survivors of the great Christological heresies and thus demonstrating Dr. Hallonsten’s ecumenical sensitivities, sensitivities which Father Georges Florovsky has associated with the “lingering Nestorianism” of much of Western Christianity, both Latin and Reformed. (Cf. my article, “Theopaschite Language in the Soteriology of St. Gregory the Theologian,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32:4 [1987].) This ecumenical attempt at a watering-down of the crucial issues of the Fourth Oecumenical Synod is not one, however, which continues throughout the book.

When Hallonsten comes to grouping the various Eastern Churches in Sweden, he divides them between the pre-Chalcedonians (Oriental or non-Chalcedonian Christians, as we Orthodox call them) and the Orthodox (properly, Eastern Orthodox), further separating the latter into “canonical” and “non-canonical” Orthodox. In explaining this latter unecumenical “epithet,” the author offers his own definition of “Eastern Orthodoxy,” passing off his definition as a criterion of “canonicity” and claiming that only those Churches in communion with Constantinople and recognized by other local Orthodox Churches are canonically Orthodox. One wonders how a scholar could accept such a definition, given the contrary position of the standard dogmatic tomes of the Orthodox Church on this issue, and why a presumably intelligent man did not immediately see a flaw in assuming that such a definitional statement was somehow canonical. Where did he find a Canon supporting this notion? Was he

just influenced by the writings of the few poor Orthodox “scholars” in Sweden and the bigotry of their jurisdictional rivalry? Or was he guided by his Roman Catholic concepts of canonicity and authority, imagining the Patriarch of Constantinople—who wishes desperately to be such a thing, unfortunately—a kind of Eastern Pope?

No doubt Mr. Hallonsten, who does not appear to be adequately schooled in Orthodox studies, gleaned some of his ideas from Swedish Orthodox writers. For example, an article about what constitutes a canonical Church (“Vad är en Kanonisk Kyrka?”) appeared some time ago in the now-defunct *Ortodox Kyrkotidning* (No. 33, 1966, pp. 339-340). This theologically unlearned article invokes and incorrectly interprets several Canons to suggest that the mutual confession of Faith by local Churches and the attribution of *honor* to Constantinople somehow support the idea that canonical Orthodox Churches must be in *communion* with Constantinople and *recognized* by *other* Orthodox Churches. Moreover, one Swedish writer cites this simplistic article, originally published in 1961 by the tiny Albanian Diocese in the United States, and wrongly attributes it to Archbishop John (Shahovskoy), the late Russian Metropolia Bishop of San Francisco, who, by the standards set forth in the article, would at the time have belonged to an uncanonical Church! If Mr. Hallonsten indeed drew on the material contained in this article, or on materials derived from it, we can see how this silly gibberish on canonicity fit into his Roman Catholic scheme of thinking about the Orthodox Churches.

With an obvious lack of familiarity with world Orthodoxy, Dr. Hallonsten uses his faulty definition of canonicity to establish that the Greek Old Calendarists and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, from which the former derive their present Episcopacy, are “uncanonical,” on account of their lack of communion with Constantinople, which See they consider to be in apostasy. And here inadequate scholarship joins bigotry to distort further the truth and to set the stage for a viciously unfair portrayal of, among other Churches, our Synod’s mission in Sweden. Hallonsten quotes a bulletin published by a dealer in Orthodox books in Stockholm, *Ortodox Tidning*, which characterizes the Greek Old Calendarists as “clearly not recognized by any other Orthodox Church,” adding another broad stroke to the portrayal of our Church as uncanonical. This is the same bulletin which, several years ago, published an outrageously libelous attack against our Synod of Bishops and Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna by the so-called “Glastonbury Patriarchate,” in England, a totally bogus “Patriarchate” which took its attack from rumors—indeed, ru-

mors that were the object of legal action—spread by a group that left the Russian Church Abroad when the group’s leaders were charged with “sexual perversion.” Furthermore, in listing the various Orthodox Churches that he considers “non-canonical,” Hallonsten groups our mission together with a vagante Swedish Bishop, married and the founder of the so-called “Apostolic Orthodox Church,” a perhaps sincere man, but one outside the pale of established Orthodoxy.

This bigotry took on greater proportions when two very ugly things occurred. First, the editor of *Ortodox Tidning* and one of the better known Orthodox clergymen in Sweden, Father Ignatius Ek, formerly a Priest of the Finnish Church and now serving under a Serbian Bishop, wrote reviews of Hallonsten’s book, praising it, in the case of Father Ek, for its exposé of the “non-canonical” Orthodox Churches. The poor state of Orthodox scholarship in Sweden might account for the fact that these two reviewers overlooked the theological absurdities in this book. But that Orthodox, let alone a clergyman, would delight in seeing a Roman Catholic scholar denigrate the millions of traditionalist believers who belong to the Greek Old Calendarist Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, and the Romanian Old Calendarist Church—this is a case of appalling bigotry and discrimination. Whether or not Father Ek, for example, likes the stand of these Churches, he would do well to remember that the Russian Church Abroad has been constantly helped by the Serbian Church to which he now belongs, the same Church from which the great supporters of the Greek Old Calendarists hailed: the blessed Bishop Nikolai (Velimirovich) and Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) of blessed memory. Unfortunately, foregoing sobriety, these reviewers represent a spirit about which the late Protospesbyter Alexander Schmemmann, while still in the Russian Metropolia, wrote so aptly and which he so sadly embraced once the Metropolia received autocephaly from the KGB-dominated Russian Patriarchate:

One hears endless discussions about the ‘canonicity’ or ‘uncanonicity’ of this or that bishop, jurisdiction, priest, parish. ...Everyone simply claims the fullness of canonicity for his own position and, in the name of it, condemns and denounces as uncanonical the ecclesiastical status of others. And one is amazed by the low level and cynicism of these ‘canonical’ fights in which any insinuation, any distortion is permitted as long as it harms the ‘enemy.’ (“Problems of Orthodoxy in America,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 8 [1964], p. 67.)

The second ugly consequence of the bigotry in question is that, on the basis of Hallonsten’s book on the Eastern Churches, wrongly assuming him to have knowledge of the Orthodox world, the Swed-

ish State Immigration Agency (Statens Invandrarverk), in its 1993 *Guiden*, or *Guide*, to immigrant religious organizations, gives an incomplete listing of the parishes of our Church's mission (avoiding the use of "St." before the names of the parishes and identifying at least one Priest without a title and as a "contact person") under the heading of "non-canonical" Orthodox Churches, suggesting that it and the other bodies listed do not fit the State's criteria for canonicity: that such a Church "must follow the Church's dogmas and canons" and must be recognized by "other local Churches." Aside from the fact that the world's millions of Old Calendarists in Greece and Romania recognize one another and constitute local Churches, they certainly follow the dogmas and canons of the Orthodox Church. In fact, they are separated from their Mother Churches and from Constantinople on account of the adoption by these Churches—and uncanonically—of the Papal Calendar (the "revised Julian calendar" in ecclesiastical "double-talk") and their desire to unite with the Vatican, not on the basis of a resolution of the profound differences between Orthodox and Roman Catholics, but for political and social reasons. Moreover, since when are Churches in a free country categorized by "epithets"? As our Bishop Chrysostomos rightly asks, "Will the Swedish immigration authorities soon require any Orthodox not in communion with Constantinople to wear yellow stars?" This is not an unheard-of consequence of state-sponsored bigotry.

In fact, there *are* "non-canonical" Orthodox Churches, such as the Apostolic Orthodox Church in Sweden. These Churches often reject what they consider the ethnic traditions of Orthodoxy and such things as celibacy for Bishops. They have what they consider valid arguments for dispensing with certain canons or dogmas, and, while they assuredly have every right in a free country to practice their faith, their very arguments for innovation place them outside the communion of Orthodox Christians. The Old Calendarists, however, are not uncanonical. They invoke the canons of the Church in resisting what they perceive as errors in their Mother Churches: that is, canons which require Orthodox to break away from their Bishops, even those with the rank of Patriarch, if those Bishops deviate from the Faith. Thus, the Old Calendarists consider Constantinople and the New Calendarist Churches to be in error for their acceptance of the Papal Calendar (which has been condemned by several Church Councils) or, in the case of the Finnish Orthodox Church, the Western date for Pascha (Easter); for participating in the services of non-Orthodox (which is forbidden by the canons); for neo-Papism (claim-

ing that the Patriarchs have anything more than a primacy of honor in the Church); for the unilateral lifting of the anathemas against Rome by the late apostate Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras (something which can only be done by a general Council of the Church and at such a time as the Roman Catholics accept the dogmas of the Orthodox Church and discard the doctrines of Papal Supremacy, the Immaculate Conception, etc.); and for embracing as “Orthodox” the non-Chalcedonian Christians, who were condemned as heretics by the Fourth and subsequent Oecumenical Synods.*

The issue of resistance is a distinctly Orthodox idea, for which reason a Roman Catholic like Mr. Hallonsten and the inadequately trained Orthodox writers in Sweden cannot understand the Old Calendarists. When Nestorius sat on the Throne of Constantinople, his errors in belief, despite the canonical order which would normally afford him a primacy of honor, placed him outside the Church, making those who resisted him truly Orthodox. This same thing applies to the iconodules, who often fought against the heresies of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Canonicity, in this case, lies in the hands of the resisters, and we Orthodox leave it to history to justify them. In the meantime, unlike Papists, we do not use the words “canonical” and “uncanonical” *per se* to characterize either those in error or those in resistance; nor do we calculate truth in terms of who is or is not in communion with some established See. These are Roman Catholic notions. For us Orthodox, the truth finally vindicates Godly resistance and temporary separations are nothing more than that process by which the Church realizes its militant duty to purge itself of what is unhealthy and wrong. If, for example, over time the modernist (New Calendarist) Orthodox Churches join Rome for political reasons, this will resolve the problem of the Old Calendar resistance. The modernists will have become something other than Orthodox, and we resisters will have maintained our Faith. This process of natural reformation is unknown in the legalistic system of Rome.

To put the issue of “canonicity”—or, more properly (to use Orthodox nomenclature), ecclesiastical legitimacy—in perspective, the cornerstone of genuine Orthodoxy is Apostolic Succession, that is, the Consecration of a Bishop by Bishops who can trace their Consecrations to the Apostles. A Church with Apostolic Succession, in turn, maintains communion with other Churches only if they have the same confession, follow the Canons, and live in the “spiritual ethos” of Orthodoxy, producing Saints who reflect the enduring spiritual gifts of the Church. Authenticity, then, is ultimately deter-

mined, not by jurisdictional legalism or ecclesiastical communalism, but on spiritual grounds. When Constantinople or other Patriarchates recognize the spiritual authenticity of a Church, they do so not by any *authority*, but by virtue of their own *spiritual* eminence. As Schmemmann observes, for those who think that “canonicity” or legitimacy means that one “has to be *under* some Patriarch, ...canonicity is reduced to subordination” (Schmemmann, *op. cit.*, p. 68). Indeed, the Patriarchs, like all Bishops, must submit *themselves* to the traditions of the Church. They express the conscience of the people of God *only when they change nothing essential to the Faith*. If their pronouncements are innovative, as were those of the extraordinary gathering of Orthodox Church leaders in Constantinople in March of 1992, they are unauthentic. Indeed, the Patriarch of Jerusalem openly chastised his fellow leaders at this meeting for their criticism of Orthodox traditionalists and their curtsy to the powers of ecumenism and the Vatican—among which leaders were those subsequently exposed as KGB collaborators and the dupes of other Eastern European secret police agencies, as well as suspected operatives of the Vatican.

In the Orthodox Church, fidelity to Holy Tradition, which includes a total and unequivocal rejection of Papism; fidelity to the precept that the Orthodox Church, while having a responsibility to embrace and aid the non-Orthodox, is the True Church of Christ, the criterion of Christianity; and absolute loyalty to those canons which forbid Orthodox to pray *with* non-Orthodox (in a Faith which also requires us to pray *for* all people)—these are the signs of legitimacy. They do not serve the desire of the Vatican to absorb the Orthodox into its jurisdiction. But they serve to protect our Faith. To accuse Old Calendarists of being “non-canonical” for upholding this traditional Faith, whether one embraces it or not, is *appalling bigotry* of the worst kind—especially when a State approves of such a thing!

* The zealot Fathers of Mount Athos, though they belong to the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople, also do not accept him as a right-believing Orthodox Bishop and thus do not commemorate him. (Among these zealots are the Fathers of the Skete of St. Basil, established in the Middle Ages, which commemorates the Synod of Old Calendarist Bishops under Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili). Even those monasteries which do commemorate the Patriarch in Constantinople have been unequivocal in their condemnation of his ecumenical excesses, as witnessed by a letter written in 1988 by the Abbots of the Monasteries of Koutloumousiou, Stavronikita, and Gregoriou, in which they remind the Patriarch that the Eastern Orthodox Church considers the Roman Catholic Church to be in heresy, recognizing neither its Priesthood nor Mysteries, and chastise him for his uncanonical actions in embracing Rome unilaterally and without the approval of the Church’s Faithful or clergy. (See the periodical *Orthodoxos Typos*, No. 800, October 26, 1988.)