



ANNIVERSARY OF AUTOCEPHALY

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DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

presents

Reflections on the Autocephaly of the **ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Why was it a good thing then?

Why is it a good thing now?

PART X

The story of Orthodoxy in North America is old enough to have triumphs and tragedies, saints and scholars, adventures and misadventures, achievements and scandals, and many fascinating bishops, priests, monastics and lay people. There is much for several volumes of narratives and reminiscences. Archives in various locations brim with material that await serious study. And yet, in the scheme of the entire history of Christianity, Orthodoxy in North America is still in its adolescence, marked by transitional events. One such event was the reception by the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) of the Tomos of Autocephaly in 1970.

I. ORTHODOX UNITY IN AMERICA & AUTOCEPHALY

The Dream

I was a nineteen-year-old college student at that time, not particularly concerned about the church; but, I well remember how my parents and others were thrilled with feelings of fulfillment and joy. A longed-for dream was accomplished, envisioned by saintly “prophets” such as St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America; St. Tikhon, Enlightener of North America and Patriarch of Moscow; and the Blessed Metropolitan Leonty. They and many other outstanding bishops and priests had come from the Russian Orthodox Church to serve in the missionary Diocese of North America. From the very beginning, in Alaska, even as they tended to the pastoral needs of Orthodox immigrants, their energies were directed towards mission and evangelization. Both St. Innocent and St. Tikhon came to see that Orthodox Christianity in North

America would become something unique and very different from the Russian Orthodox and other European Orthodox Churches.

That vision of a united "pan-Orthodox" Church was not limited to Russian churchmen. Greek, Serbian, Syrian and other ethnic Orthodox peoples were effectively incorporated under the umbrella of the missionary diocese. Their respective leaders were also focused on the creation of one, united Orthodox Church.

One such person was the remarkable Albanian bishop and cultural figure, Bishop Fan Noli. In 1955, he compiled an "Eastern Orthodox Prayerbook" in which he added a Short Catechism. The final question asks, "What should every Orthodox American pray for?" Answer: "Every Orthodox American should pray especially for the American Orthodox Church of the future, which will unite all Orthodox groups, and which will enable them to fulfill their evangelic mission in the United States of America for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."



The Dream Accomplished

"We are convinced that all those who are able to think reasonably and objectively and to transcend pettiness of jealousy, will recognize that a new beginning has come for all.... The initial fears expressed by the leadership of the Greek Archdiocese have already been largely overcome ..."

Many prayers were indeed answered in 1970 when the Russian Orthodox Greek-Catholic Church of North America (known as the "Metropolia") received the Tomos of Autocephaly and became the Orthodox Church in America. Although only five of

fourteen Autocephalous Churches recognized it (Russia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia), there was genuine joy and hope among many Orthodox Christians in the United States and in Western Europe. With the exception of a very small minority, members of the Metropolia welcomed the event as a glorious "coming of age" experience. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, who was instrumental in the process, claimed that words were incapable of truly describing "the experience of joy and light, an undeserved gift, truly given by God."

Even those who didn't accept the autocephaly realized that it denoted a significant moment in Church history. Writing at that time, Fr. John Meyendorff said,

"We are convinced that all those who are able to think reasonably and objectively and to transcend pettiness of jealousy, will recognize that a new beginning has come for all.... The initial fears expressed by the leadership of the Greek Archdiocese have already been largely overcome ..."

Fr. John concluded his editorial with the confident hope that the Greek Orthodox Church of America will take a lead in "contributing to a pan-Orthodox agreement which will lead to a full administrative unity in America. In any case, the basis for such a unity has now been laid in conformity with history, the canons and the traditions of Orthodoxy."

A Meaningful Storm

Though there was much excitement and enthusiasm, there were rough moments, too. Several of the Metropolia parishes (about three or four) left to join the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), resulting in costly and bitter lawsuits. The number of lost parishes was offset by those from the Moscow Patriarchate's North American Exarchate that joined the OCA.



There were spirited and bitter exchanges between some of the Orthodox Churches. Immediately after autocephaly was given, letters circulated between the Russian Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, each forcefully presenting their contending positions. A lively and passionate debate took place between the ROCOR Metropolitan Philaret and Metropolitan Ireney. Fr.



Schmemmann referred to those debates as a "meaningful storm." His important essay bearing that title remains the most thorough and persuasive theological articulation of the autocephaly.

Among well-intentioned American Orthodox clergy and laity, the prospect of a unified Church in North America was positively enhanced with the OCA's autocephaly. In various discussions and conferences, hopeful sentiments grew. Even when the OCA was not directly involved, the autocephaly was recognized as a reminder that movement in the right direction had begun. The high point of aspirations came with the Ligonier Meeting in 1994, and there was a brief period of hope.

But, retribution from Constantinople was swift in coming and other European Mother Churches were likewise unwilling to let go. Today, North America Orthodox divisions are more glaring than ever, and the world's Orthodox Churches are in a state of paralyzing animosity.

So, this Fiftieth Anniversary of the OCA's autocephaly presents us with challenging questions: What can we say about it? What happened? And why? Perhaps the most crucial and painful question: was it a mistake?

For this jubilee year, the OCA planned events that would have brought people together to discuss and reflect on these questions. Alas, Covid-19 appeared and most of those events have been cancelled and rescheduling appears unlikely.

The Original Agenda

While discussion about Orthodox unity in America and autocephaly go hand in hand, there is an often-overlooked fact. The original issue at hand was not about Orthodox unity but concerned the canonical irregularity of the Metropolia.

It is easy to overlook this because, from the beginning, autocephaly was seen as the initiation of movement toward Orthodox unity in America. This appears in the text of the Tomos where we read about building "a peaceful and creative church life, and to suppress scandalous ecclesiastical divisions; hoping that this act would be beneficial to the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church and would make possible the development among the local parts of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of such relations which would be founded on the firm ties of the one Orthodox Faith and the love that the Lord Jesus Christ willed."



The OCA itself was eager to fan the hopes that Orthodox unity was imminent. At the very moment of the Tomos' reception in May, 1970, Fr. John Meyendorff wrote that autocephaly

makes the Orthodox Church in America "a witness that Orthodoxy must transcend nationalism and be open to our tremendous missionary responsibility and to our responsibility for unity among ALL Orthodox Christians in this country."

Until rather recently, the OCA's official proclamations often asserted the vision of unity. In 1992, at the 10th All American Council, Metropolitan Theodosius gave a comprehensive report on the state of the church, concluding that: "we as the Orthodox Church in America can only continue to press the message of unity and to build the body of Christ entrusted to our care, and to do that well."

A Surprising Bonus

As indicated above, there were some hopeful moments, such as the Ligonier Meeting. Also, in many regional areas, local pan-Orthodox clergy have successfully established positive cooperation.

But, generally, over fifty years, the OCA's autocephaly has not been the effective catalyst for lasting unity. Why? Because both before and after 1970, other Orthodox jurisdictions are happily entrenched either in their own ethnic mother Churches, or simply are content in being who they are. As independent and functioning jurisdictions, they have no compelling reason to change. Moreover, the major Orthodox Churches are comfortable in their own particular valid canonicity. It was precisely the absence of that kind of canonicity that precipitated the negotiations between the Metropolia and the Russian Church. In a real sense, autocephaly was actually a surprising bonus in what began as a project to regularize the Metropolia's canonical status.

The canonical irregularity stemmed from the North American Diocese's declaration of temporary autonomy in 1922. By that point, it was clear that the violently atheistic Communist regime had become the ruling government in Russia, subjecting the Russian Church to deprivation and annihilation. Under unimaginable circumstances, Patriarch Tikhon first assigned but then suspended the ruling North American bishop, Metropolitan Platon. This put the Metropolia in a precarious position with disastrous economic and legal problems, one notable case being the loss of St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York to the Living Church.



For the next twenty years, various attempts at some kind of normalization took place. There was the possibility of joining the ROCOR contingent while others sought to reaffirm allegiance to the Russian Church. Following World War II, when the Soviet Union and the United States were allied

against Nazi Germany, there was a push in the Metropolia to “repent and reunite” with the Moscow Patriarchate. But the majority were unwilling to do so; and thus, in 1947 the Moscow Patriarchate decreed that Metropolitan Theophilus and his bishops, and therefore the entire Metropolia, were schismatics.

Meanwhile, Back at the Farm

Most of the parishioners who attended Metropolia churches were not affected. In fact, those were years of dynamic growth. In the 1940’s and 50’s, the Metropolia had perhaps ten times as many parishioners as the OCA does today. The baby boom resulted in many baptisms, there was a strong push for services in English, and for educational and youth programs.

But, in relations with other Orthodox Churches, the uncanonical situation was a source of anguish. Until the late 1960’s, when negotiations with the Moscow Patriarchate began, the Metropolia existed in canonical limbo. Morale was kept up by a few articulate clerics such as Metropolitan Leonty, Archbishop John (Shakovskoy) and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Their writings in both Russian and English defended the canonical legitimacy of the Metropolia in what were extremely unusual circumstances. That the Metropolia was able to sustain a dignified confidence in itself and promote healthy church life is a testimony to them.

II. THE TOMOS OF AUTOCEPHALY

Sources

There are as yet no comprehensive official accounts detailing the proceedings that led to the 1970 Tomos. The most important complete description is by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in the book, *Orthodox America, 1794-1976*. In addition to providing a summarized history of the Metropolia up to the 1960s, this is his valuable first-person recollection about the events in which he was directly involved.



Another essential source is the article by Dr. Paul Meyendorff, entitled, “Fr. John Meyendorff and the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America.” Also noteworthy is the essay of remembrance by Metropolitan Theodosius (Lazor), which he contributed to a book dedicated to the memory of Metropolitan Nikodim.

From these, we can establish a somewhat jagged but fairly accurate narrative regarding the sequence of events and the names of the central personages.

1961-1963: First Contacts

There would be no story of the Tomos of Autocephaly if not for Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad. He was as brilliant and as controversial as any Russian churchman of the 20th century. There is little about him in English and even in Russian there are remembrances but no "official" life. His critical role in the OCA's history is confirmed by another important Russian hierarch, Archbishop Basil (Krivochiene), who wrote that the autocephaly was one of the Metropolitan's main achievements. Fr. Schmemmann candidly acknowledged that the goal of autocephaly, which was beset by many potential breaking points, was "salvaged by the unmistakable desire of Metropolitan Nikodim to reach an agreement."

The first contact between the two sides occurred at the 1961 World Council of Churches Assembly in New Delhi. Fr. John Meyendorff was able "to meet and speak informally" with Metropolitan Nikodim, then still an Archbishop but already the Chair of the Moscow Patriarchate's External Affairs Department.

The next significant contact was in 1963. Some details in Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's recollections are sketchy, but he remembers key moments with photographic precision. He recalls a "rainy evening in March of 1963," when an old Episcopal friend of St. Vladimir's Seminary, Dr. Paul Anderson, called to say that a representative from the Moscow Patriarchate was a guest of the Episcopal Church in the United States and wanted to visit St. Vladimir's Seminary. A bus full of Russian Orthodox clergy showed up at the Seminary's new campus in Crestwood, NY and proceeded to the small chapel during the evening service. In that group was Archbishop Nikodim. During a quickly organized informal visit, Archbishop Nikodim took Fr. Alexander aside and said that "in his opinion, the time was ripe for 'resolving our misunderstanding.'"



A few days later, at a dinner at the OCA's Syosset Chancery, Archbishop Nikodim met with 87-year-old, frail but dignified, Metropolitan Leonty. Fr. Alexander believed that meeting and hearing Metropolitan Leonty planted the idea of autocephaly in Archbishop Nikodim. But later in 1963, in Rochester, NY, encounters between Metropolitan Nikodim and Metropolia representatives were not fruitful. It became evident that there were obstacles that

required much deliberation. Metropolitan Leonty's illness and death in 1965 and other factors prevented additional meetings until 1968.

1963-1967: Mounting Pressure

According to Dr. Paul Meyendorff, between 1963 and 1967, Fr. John Meyendorff “maintained informal contacts with Metropolitan Nikodim and with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, who encouraged the Metropolia to develop and maintain contact with the Moscow Patriarchate.” In between those years, the Metropolia’s uncanonical status was becoming a critical issue. Metropolitan Ireney wrote an appeal to the heads of the Autocephalous Churches to begin an initiative that would resolve the issue of the Orthodox diaspora, but only the Archbishop of Finland replied.

In 1966, the Synod of Bishops sent Fr. Alexander Schmemmann to Patriarch Athenogoras to discuss a possible solution. As Fr. Alexander famously recalled, he was warmly greeted but the Patriarch’s response was forthright: “You are Russians, go to your Mother Church, for no one can solve your problem except the Russian Church.”

Shortly thereafter, the Greek Archbishop Iakovos informed the Metropolia that he had received orders from Constantinople to suspend communion with the Metropolia. Although the directive was temporarily sidestepped, the pressure to regularize the situation was mounting.

1968-1970: Breakthrough and Signing

In August, 1968, the World Conference of Churches Assembly met in Uppsala, at which Metropolitan Nikodim met with the Metropolia’s delegation, Archbishop John (Shahovskoy), Fr. John Meyendorff and Sergei Verhovskoy. That encounter precipitated constructive initiatives from both sides.

That September, Fr. John Meyendorff sent Metropolitan Nikodim a personal letter informing him that the Metropolia “was ready to hold a secret and informal meeting between representatives of the two churches.” Metropolitan Nikodim replied positively in December and arrived next month in New York for a series of unofficial meetings. Based on documents in the OCA’s Archives that he was able to view, Dr. Meyendorff summarizes that it was at these meetings that both sides began considering the possibility of autocephaly as the best resolution of the Metropolia’s status. Evidently, Metropolitan Nikodim

“stated that it was pointless to speak about the reasons that led to the break with the mother church and the Metropolia; rather the focus should be on the future.” At those meetings, the



Metropolia was represented by Bishop Kiprian, Fr. Joseph Pishtey, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Fr. John Meyendorff, Fr. John Skvir, Fr. Kirill Fotiev and Sergei Verhovskoy.

In the Fall of 1969, a meeting took place in Geneva. The Russian delegation included Hieromonk Kirill (Gundiev), the current Patriarch of Moscow. Among the significant issues at stake, was the regularization of the Japanese Orthodox Church, which had been temporarily under the jurisdiction of the Metropolia since the end of World War II. For that reason, the next meeting was in Tokyo, in November, 1968. Certain substantive issues were resolved at the Tokyo meeting, clearing the way to inform the entire Metropolia about the negotiations and the prospect of autocephaly.



To obtain consensus from the church at large, some of the Metropolia's negotiators went to various diocesan gatherings to explain what was envisioned. In March of 1970, Metropolitan Nikodim returned to America and a final meeting took place in Syosset, NY on March 31, 1970 at which a joint agreement was signed. Metropolitan Nikodim returned to Russia to brief his Holy Synod. On April 10, 1970, Patriarch Alexis I signed the Tomos. On April 14, the Metropolia received the telegram from Moscow

(dated, April 13) in New York, announcing that the Tomos had been signed. Three days later, April 17, the 92-year old Patriarch Alexis passed away. It was providentially fitting that Patriarch Alexis, one of the last living Russian bishops consecrated before the Revolution, would end his long and tumultuous ecclesiastical life with the signing of that Tomos!

But ... Why Autocephaly?



The March 31, 1970 Agreement and the Tomos are available on the OCA website. They are truly impressive documents. Positive in tone throughout, they are also canonical-legal documents which outline the alterations that were to take place between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Metropolia.

But, after reading and reflecting on them, something seems to be missing. Perhaps it was unintentional or

deliberately to avoid complications. Absent is any indication as to why specifically autocephaly was granted.

I referred above to Dr Paul Meyendorff's report that autocephaly was first raised at the informal meeting in New York. But, much of what really happened at that informal meeting is unknown. I did not have a chance to view the documents in question which Dr. Meyendorff did; even so, he does not indicate much more than that they began to consider autocephaly, and that Fr John Meyendorff laid out bullet points about going forward. As we said, these were unofficial meetings and the report that Dr. Meyendorff saw was prepared "in confidence" and not as an official record.



So, the question remains: why autocephaly? Given the fact that for some fifty years, the relationship between the Metropolia and the Russian Church was fractured and adversarial, would not some kind of canonical autonomy, or even a prolonged *détente* have made more sense? Why would the Moscow Patriarchate, after adamantly regarding the Metropolia as schismatic, be willing to pardon and reward it with autocephaly?

Answers are elusive. Fr. Schmemmann conveniently dodges the questions by stating at the beginning of his recollections that the "full and dispassionate history of the events which preceded and led to the Tomos of 1970 cannot as yet be written." Later he added that someday

"a detailed history of the negotiations will be written. Here I will only say that they were difficult, sometimes painful, more than once reaching what seemed a breaking point." Dr. Paul Meyendorff's article only partially fills in the lacunae in Fr. Schmemmann's account.

In 2016, an article appeared by Russian Church historian, Andrei Kostriukov, under the title: "The presentation of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America in light of documents in the church archives." The author sets out to answer the question, "Why would the Moscow Patriarchate, which demanded severe concessions and had imposed harsh disciplinary measures on the North American Metropolia, go the extra distance in 1970 and grant autocephaly?" At the outset of his article, he concedes that his study will be fragmentary because "information about the preparations and circumstances of the granting of autocephaly is almost completely inaccessible at this time."

Politics

To complicate obtaining a detailed account, we cannot forget that the negotiations took place during what was the height of the cold war. The Russian Church's actions and statements were carefully monitored and controlled by the Soviet government. An action as notable as giving autocephaly to an American Orthodox Church would surely have to be reviewed by government officials. Although information about the Soviet government's view on the autocephaly is unavailable, it is fair to assume that, had there been objections, there would be no autocephaly today. However, even the hint of Soviet influence had repercussions; several Metropolia parishes joined ROCOR because of it.

The politics which emerged and had consequence were on the pan-Orthodox level, between Moscow and Constantinople. In other words, the OCA's autocephaly was another episode in the centuries-long, love-hate history of relations between the two major Orthodox Patriarchates. It is quite probable that the underlying reason for granting autocephaly from the point of view of the Moscow Patriarchate had nothing to do either with recognition of the Metropolia as a self-sustaining and self-governing canonical body, or with a formulated ecclesiological vision of Orthodox unity in North America. Kostriukov, for example, in the aforementioned article, concludes that the "main reason in granting autocephaly to the North American Metropolia was directly related to the hostile opposition between the Russian and Constantinopolitan Churches."



What the Tomos Accomplished

We may never know the complete story, but the Moscow Patriarchate's decision was an excellent solution. It addressed the Metropolia's canonical quagmire and also put the Patriarchate in a win-win situation. Since Constantinople was unwilling to deal with the "American Russian Orthodox," the Moscow Patriarchate justifiably entered into negotiations with the Metropolia, the descendant of the original, canonical Orthodox presence, the Russian Church's missionary North American diocese.

Other canonical solutions were possible; but, autocephaly allowed the Moscow Patriarchate to accomplish several things. First, the Metropolia acquired canonical status, recognized by some if not all Autocephalous Churches. Second, the Moscow Patriarchate suspended its claims to North America by dissolving its North American Exarchate, which at that time was a burden to them. Third, the new Orthodox Church in America became a loyal "sister" Church to what was then a much-suffering Russian Church.

"THE CHURCH, TO BE THAT WHICH ETERNALLY SHINES AND ILLUMINES US IN THE PRIMORDIAL AND ESSENTIAL ECCLESIOLOGY IN WHICH THE UNIQUE AND ETERNAL EXPERIENCE, FORM AND CONSCIOUSNESS—THE VERY BEING—OF THE CHURCH, HAVE FOUND THEIR EXPRESSION."

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

Yet, what was then and remains the most important accomplishment of the Tomos was that it gave concrete substance to fundamental theological principles and made them incarnate. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann concluded in his essay, "A Meaningful Storm," the Tomos of Autocephaly revitalized the true meaning of Orthodox ecclesiology. It initiated the absolutely necessary return to being "the Church, to be that which

eternally shines and illumines us in the primordial and essential ecclesiology in which the unique and eternal experience, form and consciousness—the very being—of the Church, have found their expression." Whatever political or personal feelings, decisions or reservations may be relevant, the autocephaly is the canonical touchstone by which, through which, or even in opposition to which, the future of North American Orthodoxy will be appraised.

That there would be consequences to autocephaly was foreseen. Constantinople's infuriation was going to take place one way or another. Dr. Meyendorff's article reports that Metropolitan

Nikodim, when asked about the possible reactions to autocephaly, said that "Constantinople would not be happy but that would not be a problem." Unfortunately, on this the Metropolitan was wrong; it was a problem. The reactions of other autocephalous Churches have varied over the years. For some it was a non-issue, others ignored it until they could not. But the fact remains that the Tomos of Autocephaly made possible the creation of a viable, functioning and self-sustaining Orthodox Church with bishops, priests, deacons, monastics, seminaries, monasteries and a vibrant constituency of American Orthodox Christians.

A Miraculous Manifestation

The story of the Tomos of Autocephaly cannot be told without acknowledging those involved. There were many, bishops, priests, monastics, lay people, theologians, administrators, lawyers, historians, even martyrs. Of course, the time itself was propitious. Political and social circumstances were aligned just right with the heavenly spheres. Also propitious was the fact that an extraordinary man, Metropolitan Nikodim, had come to possess such authority and influence in the Russian Church. His contending partners were two remarkable priests, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. John Meyendorff. Both of these gifted "men of the Church" were in the prime of life, utilizing to full effect their theological knowledge and administrative skills. Possessing a deep love for God, as revealed in the Trinity, and love for the Church and Orthodox Tradition, they were wise and astute, and not without a sense of humor. (Fr. Schmemmann insisted that the Agreement be signed before midnight of March 31, so as to avoid it being done on "April Fool's Day!")

The Tomos of Autocephaly is a sacred document of a holy event! Absolutely unique circumstances, once-in-a-lifetime conditions, and the providential meetings of exceptional people all combined to facilitate the miraculous manifestation that is the Tomos. Not to recognize the presence of divine grace not only denies the value of autocephaly but also brings into question how the Holy Spirit works in the Church.

Writing in 1970, Fr. Meyendorff was correct in noting that the OCA now bears a very heavy responsibility, adding that if the Church were a human organization only and not the true Body of Christ, we would fail. But, he adds, "May the power of God, 'made perfect in weakness' (1Cor. 9.9), help us."

It is true that, at times, members of the OCA were overly enthusiastic about the gift and forgot about the responsibility. As the OCA enters the second half of its first century, we should proceed with prayerful introspection and reflect on what the autocephaly means now. A collective repentance would be a good place to begin.

A Collective Repentance

Over the past fifty years the institutional weaknesses of the OCA have become painfully evident. Financial malfeasance, cases of sexual misconduct, administrative chaos, internecine squabbling and the present spiritual afflictions that affect society have all contributed to the loss of membership, loss of revenue and, most unfortunately, loss of vision.



In this writer's opinion, a debilitating factor has been the insistence of some bishops that the wholeness of the Church is contained within their own dioceses. The result has been dioceses—some of which have but several hundred members—with their own translations, liturgical practices, educational programs, etc. The variations between dioceses can be truly disconcerting.

Of course, there are reasons and need for diocesan structure and order, and the canonical imperatives of each diocesan hierarch are established by sacred tradition. However, the disproportionate development of "diocesan sovereignty" at the expense of the Central Church has weakened the OCA.

What Does the Tomos Mean Today?

Today, many if not most OCA parishioners are casually indifferent about autocephaly. But the OCA endures! Although attacked, misunderstood, misconstrued, even forgotten, the vision does remain. It is a dynamic vision, a work in progress, born out of suffering and sweating blood.

During these fifty years, there have been fits and starts and periods of soul-searching introspection, but always a recurring desire to recover the vision. At All-American Councils, conferences, lay ministry gatherings, diocesan and deanery meetings, clergy and people have spoken, debated, reflected on and written about the vision of the OCA. At its core, it is a vision of a Church that is Trinitarian and Christ-centered, Scriptural and Traditional, encompassing and inclusive, a Church built on the ground of freedom and truth, unbounded from the gravitational pull of party spirit, blind ethnic prejudices, constraining superstitious habits, inhibiting pharisaic formalism, and fear of rational scientific progress.

The Tomos has not lost its relevance. It remains the foundational document by which we measure and evaluate our collective life as members of the OCA. The Tomos is a statement of commitment to be conscientious children of God and stewards of His mysteries; a declaration of allegiance to the Heavenly Kingdom by people of God living in North America at this time. History, culture, secularism, society, and modernity have contaminated life and the life of Orthodox Christians. But the essence of the Church remains, providing entry into the Kingdom of God.



In one of his Journal entries, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann laments, "Why [are] Christians forgetting it, and how can one come back to it? The essence of Orthodox revival and universal mission should be to bear witness to the Kingdom, to call people to the Kingdom. Everything is there: overcoming secularism, answers to contemporary problems of culture, history, religion, etc."

For some of us, sinful as we are, that Kingdom is accessible in the Orthodox Church in America. In its history much has changed, but the OCA remains the living and real presence of the Kingdom of God here and now, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

