

Archbishop of Ohrid and
Metropolitan of Skopje Jovan

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OHRID ARCHBISHOPRIC

“To my father by flesh Argir, lying in blessed repose, who undeniably built himself in the history of the Ohrid Archbishopric as a ktetor, passing over from this world in the time of my prison sentence in the Idrizovo Penitentiary“.

1. The Time of Christianisation of the People Living on the Geographic Territories of Macedonia until the Arrival of the Slavs

The people on the territory which is today under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric were Christianized ever since apostolic times. Apostle Paul himself came to the Roman province of Macedonia. His visits and organisation of the church life in Philippi, Thessalonika, Veria and other places in this province are known and confirmed. Some presume that if Apostle Paul took a missionary journey to Dalmatia on land, then he certainly went through several towns in today's FYRO Macedonia, and in that case it is difficult to suppose that he did not pass through Heraclion (today's Bitola), or Lychnidos (today's Ohrid), through which road Egnatia (via Egnatia) led connecting by land Constantinople and Rome.

Ever since the time of the Apostles, until the arrival of the Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula, on the territory of today's FYRO Macedonia, people mainly communicated in Greek. This had been the case since the fourth century before Christ, when Alexander the Great (336-323), under the influence of his master Aristotle, introduced Greek as “kini”

(common). This language was mutual, or common language for all the peoples in his kingdom, regardless whether they were Greek or of other ethnic origin. So, the Macedonians from the time of Alexander the Great (without speculating whether it had been so before), until the time of arrival of the Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula, spoke Greek only. The excavations in the Ancient towns Heraclion, Lychnidos, Scupi, Stobi, Bargala and many other locations on the territory of today's FYRO Macedonia are evidence for this. During the first three centuries after Christ, when Christians were being persecuted and tortured, many martyrs and confessors shone from this territory. The names of the Fifteen Saints Martyrs of Tiberiopolis from today's Strumitza and of Saint Hieromartyr Erasmus of Ohrid are known everywhere.

After Constantine the Great (324-337) legalized the Church, a much more organized church life began to develop in the then Roman province of Macedonia. Many towns became diocesan seats. Besides the archaeological evidence, a witness for this are also the documents from the Ecumenical and Local Councils. For example: Budius, the Bishop of Stobi (Veles) participated in the First Ecumenical Council; Evagrius, the Bishop of Heraclion (Bitola), participated in the Council of Sardica (343); Quintilus, the Bishop of Heraclion (Bitola), in the Robber Council of Ephesus (449); Nicholas, the Bishop of Stoby (Veles), is under-signed in the acts of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Benino, the Bishop of Heraclion (Bitola), participated in the Fifth Ecumenical Council; and, also, Phocas, as Bishop of Stobi, participated in this Council.

The first Church, in the rank of local Churches on the territory of the province of Macedonia, was Justiniana Prima. This is where the cathedra of the Archbishop of the Church was located, and in 535 it got the same rank of autonomy as the great territories: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Cyprus. In his 11th novella, the holy tsar Justinian (527-565), probably because of gratitude towards his native place, proclaimed Justiniana Prima a cathedra of the Archbishop, granting it a church autonomy, putting under its jurisdiction the following territories: Dacia Mediterranean, Dacia Ripensis, Mysia Secunda, Dardania, Praevalitana, Macedonia Secunda, and one part of - Pannonia Secunda. Al-

most the same areas would later become part of the Ohrid Archbishopric. The first Archbishop of Justiniana Prima was Chatelian. The aforesaid territories, before the foundation of the Archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, were under direct jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Thessalonica, and he was under jurisdiction of the Roman Pope. The aforesaid novella terminated the influence of both the Roman Pope and of the Metropolitan of Thessalonica when an Archbishop of Justiniana Prima of Elected.

Granting such wide church autonomy to the territories of the Archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, which were so far under indirect jurisdiction of the Roman Pope, provoked great reactions of the Pope Agapitos I (535-536).

Under the influence of the coercions of Rome, ten years after the foundation of Justiniana Prima in 545, tsar Justinian issued a new novella known as the 131st, which in a certain way reduced the autonomous church administration of the Archbishopric in favour of the Roman Pope. Nevertheless, the Roman Pope had no such authority over the Archbishop of Justiniana Prima (who was elected by the local Synod) as the authority he had over the Metropolitan of Thessalonica, who was a vicar to the Pope and the Pope could revoke him at any time. In the 131st novella of Justinian the Great, the names of the same regions mentioned in the 11th novella under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Justiniana Prima are repeated. Some deny the 11th novella because it did not enter the Nomocanon of the Great Church, but in this regard the 131st novella is undisputable.

2. Since the Arrival of the Slavs on the Geographic Territories of Macedonia until the Issuance of the Chrysobulls of Basil II Bulgarokthonos for Foundation of the Ohrid Archbishopric

The Ohrid Archbishopric arose from Justiniana Prima, which is a continuation of the apostolic Church on the territory which is today under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric. Certainly, the history of the Church about the abovementioned territories does not

leave out the fact that the territory, on which the Ohrid Archbishopric would later spread, was part of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. During the rule of the Bulgarian tsar Boris (Michael, 852-889), the disciples of the Slavic Enlighteners Methodius and Cyril, sts Clement and Nahum came to Ohrid. The tsar gave them good working conditions, and they established their mission right in Ohrid, among the Slavs. Clement was ordained a Bishop and a seat first in Strumitza, and later in Ohrid, and Nahum founded a koinonical monastery on Lake Ohrid's shore. The first Slavic University was established in Ohrid under immediate management by the holy Bishop Clement.

It is a fact that the Ohrid Archbishopric appeared in the Western Bulgarian Kingdom, formed by Samuel (976-1014). It also is a fact that the Bulgarian Patriarch of Dorostol while moving reached Ohrid. However, this does not have sufficient ecclesiastical backing so as to be considered that the Ohrid Archbishopric is continuation of the Bulgarian Patriarchate with a seat in Dorostol. There are opinions that with the moving of the Patriarch of Dorostol, the Patriarchate also moved, and reached Ohrid. Nevertheless, for a connoisseur about the Orthodox Church ecclesiology it is clear that it is impossible for a Bishop, be he a Patriarch, to obtain the jurisdictional rights over the flock on those territories by his simple moving, without receiving a continuous confirmation by the Synod of the Church that he is given the jurisdiction over the flock where he had moved, and at the same time to revoke the jurisdiction of the Bishop who had had the jurisdiction over that same territory until the arrival of the Patriarch. Consequently, it is not possible for the Patriarchate to move with the Patriarch's moving in a time of need. Even if the administration of the Patriarchate moved together with the Patriarch, it is not sufficient evidence that the Patriarchate also moved.

An Archbishopric or a Patriarchate is where the first cathedra of the Church is. It can be located anywhere the Church would decide, although, it is highly recommendable that this be in the administrative centre of the territory, and it is not the same whether this would be

Dorostol or Ohrid. Those are two different local Churches, consisted of different people, different clergy, and besides being geographically distant, they are also distant in terms of culture and customs. Simply said, even though the Church is one, Dorostol and Ohrid are two different local Churches. Even if we accept the theoretical possibility that, having moved, the Patriarch of Dorostol came to Ohrid, this is not evidence that he translated the Bulgarian Patriarchate to Ohrid. The Ohrid Church is not the same as the Dorostol Church. This certainly does not exclude the possibility for Dorostol to lose the church primate one day, as it happened, and Ohrid to receive it. Yet, from a church, or an ecclesiological aspect, it is not the same local Church, although both Churches are One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The aforesaid may seem as propaganda to someone, which tends to deprecate the relationship between the Bulgarian Patriarchate and the Ohrid Archbishopric. We have no aim to prove that the Ohrid Archbishopric was not a Bulgarian Church as well. It is historically undeniable that many Ohrid Archbishops had also the title Archbishops of the whole of Bulgaria. It is also historically indubitable that when moving from Dorostol, through Sredetz, Meglinis and Edessa, the Bulgarian Patriarch arrived to Prespa. The aforesaid ecclesiological review has a completely different purpose. It gives an ecclesiological interpretation of the historical fact of moving of the Patriarch of Dorostol. According to the Orthodox Church teaching about the structure of the Church, it is not possible to accept the theory that with the Patriarch of Dorostol's moving the Patriarchate of Dorostol also moved to Ohrid. On the contrary, if a confirmation of an ecclesiastical character is given to the historical event of the moving of the Patriarch of Dorostol, then the Orthodox ecclesiology would not differ from the Roman-Catholic one, according to which the Pope is superior to the other Bishops, so even if, for example, he moved to Avignon, and it is logical that he cannot be a Bishop of Rome, he still remains superior to other Bishops only because he is Pope. In our opinion, this is utterly unacceptable from an Orthodox point of view of the Church, according to which, the fullness of the

Church is in its local conciliarity (catholicity), and not exclusively in its ecumenical catholicity.¹

Thus, without overlooking the fact that the Bulgarian Patriarchs were recognized under the title - Patriarch in Samuel's state, and that at the time of his rule the Patriarchal cathedra was moved from Prespa to Ohrid, it should be said that those Patriarchs, after leaving Dorostol, were never recognized under the title Patriarch, neither by the Patriarchate of Constantinople nor by the Byzantine tsar.

In 995 the following dioceses were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Prespa, who was titled a Patriarch in Samuel's Western Bulgarian Kingdom: Prespa, Devol, Cephalonia (Glaven), Heraclion (Pelagonia), Morsovitz, Meglinis, Tiberiopolis (Strumitza), Veria and Servia, Larissa, Navpaktos, Durricum (Drac), Skopje, Liplyan, Prizren, Rashka, Srem, Belgrade, Branitchevo, Vidin, Triadia or Sredetz, Nish, Velbuzhd and Preslav; which later, during the reign of Basil II Bulgaroktonos (976-1025), after the issuance of his three chrysobulls for independence of the Ohrid Archbishopric, the total number of the dioceses which were under jurisdiction of the Archbishopric increased to 32.

3. Since the Foundation of the Ohrid Archbishopric until the Turkish Invasion of the Balkan Peninsula

The year 1018 is considered to be the year of establishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric, when the Byzantine tsar Basil II Bulgar-

¹ According to the Orthodox ecclesiology, there are two criteria for catholicity of the Church. One is connected with the local Eucharist community which, having the structure: Bishop, priest, deacon and people of God, having the true faith and apostolic succession is full, catholic Church. The other criterion for catholicity is measured by the unity of the local Churches in the ecumene, and is manifested through acceptance (receiving), or we can also call it mutual recognition of those local catholic Churches in the ecumene. In the Roman-catholic Church the criterion for ecumenical catholicity is dominant, i.e. the criterion for a universal Church. From this criterion and for this

oktonos, after defeating Samuel conquered the territories in the Patriarch's jurisdiction with seat in Ohrid. He issued three decrees with a tsar's golden seal (chrysobull), by which the legal state and jurisdiction of the Archbishopric were regulated. In the first chrysobull, John (1018-1037) is called Archbishop, a title which would later be born by his successors until the abolishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric in 1767. In this chrysobull the dioceses belonging to the Archbishopric are listed, as well as the number of the clergymen and clerks in each of these. From the chrysobull of Basil II Bulgaroktonos, one can see that he protected the Ohrid Archbishopric from internal and external influences, so that clergymen were freed from certain fees and taxes.

Because of the aforesaid we agree with those who recon that Basil II Bulgaroktonos based the issuing of his three chrysobulls for the autocephaly of the Ohrid Archbishopric on the 11th and 131st novellas issued by tsar Justinian I, and having in regard the autocephaly of Justiniana Prima, and not the speculation that the Ohrid Archbishopric is continuity of the Bulgarian Patriarchate from Dorostol.

The first Archbishop John I was born in the village of Agnoandiki, near Debar, and he was tonsured a monk in the monastery Holy Theotokos in Debar. He was a man with many gifts and respected as such by the people.

The number of 32 dioceses in the Archbishopric, which was the overall number after tzar Basil's three chrysobulls, often changed depending on the change of political power in the region. The seat

criterion papalism is institutionalized.

Attempts to introduce the universal criterion of catholicity of the Church over the criterion for catholicity of each local Church by certain Patriarchs of the Eastern Church are also known, with an aim to institutionalize the Patriarchate as a legal mechanism to guarantee the unity of the Church. We believe that the analyses are led by such false ecclesiology, that no matter if the Bulgarian Patriarch was moving from a diocese to a diocese he kept the Patriarchal rights. This is contrary to the ecclesiological criterion for catholicity of each local Eucharist community. Nobody has the right, without his agreement or with no trial to discharge a Bishop of a local Church and to deprive him of the jurisdiction over his diocese. Certainly, even the Patriarch has no such right, thus it is clear why the moving of the Bulgarian Patriarchate cannot be considered as moving of the Patriarchate, or as moving of the Primate of that local Church.

of the Archbishopric and many of the dioceses were located on the geographical territory of Macedonia. The procedure of election of the Archbishop is not given in the chrysobulls, but according to some historians, the Archbishop was elected by the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric, and then confirmed by the Byzantine tsar.

Nevertheless, one should not search for examples of autocephaly or autonomy of the same type as those of the 19th century in the Middle Ages. The autocephaly and autonomy in the Orthodox Church ecclesiology do not mean a complete self-governance up to the level of separateness, but they mean not interfering in the matters of a local Church as long as the actions taken by it do not concern another local Church. This means that each diocese has a certain level of autonomy or autocephaly, but even an entire Patriarchate is not allowed to do anything which contradicts the unity with the local Churches, regardless of the fact that it is self-governing. Starting from this an ecclesiological and canonical standing of the Church, the Archbishop of Ohrid, although there is evidence that his Church was autocephalous, participated in the meetings of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and his seat was immediately after the Patriarch's. It is well known that in a dispute which the Archbishop Theophylactus (1084-1108) had with the Patriarch of Constantinople over the building of the stavropegial monastery in Kitchevo, he wrote the Bishop of Halkidon who was very close to the Patriarch, that the Ohrid Archbishopric was autocephalous and the Patriarch had no right to ordain there; and it is also known that when John Komnen (1143-1160) was Archbishop of the Ohrid Archbishopric, at the Constantinople Council in 1143, he did not sit together with the other Bishops, but next to the Patriarch, as well as at the Council against the heretic Sotirichos in 1156, i.e. 1157, when he sat where the Patriarchs sat, and before the Archbishop of Cyprus. He signed the Council's acts right after the Patriarch did.

Supreme administrative body of the Ohrid Archbishopric was the Holy Assembly of Bishops, consisted of all the diocesan Bishops with their Primate, the Archbishop, at the head of it. Being very

difficult for all the Hierarchs to gather at that time, decision-making was handed over to the Synod, the number of Bishops in which is not known. It is reckoned that those Bishops who could arrive there were in the Synod, for travelling was not easy at that time.

The Chairman of the Assembly and the Synod was the Archbishop, meaning that he represented the Archbishopric everywhere. The Archbishop sealed the acts with a lead seal. He had the rights of a Bishop with jurisdictional authority in his Archbishopric and in the stavropegial monasteries.

After the first Archbishop, John I, who was probably a Slav, almost all other Archbishops were Greek. The second Archbishop was Leon (1037-1056), known by the fact that he was on the same side with the Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Cerularius (1043-1059) during the time of schism with the Church of Rome and he wrote to the Pope of Rome about the novelties introduced by the Roman Church, and which were obstacles to unity. He is also known to be founder of the cathedral church Saint Sophia in Ohrid. After him, Theophilactus (1084-1108), was an Archbishop, and then Michael (1120-?), who, just as Leon, came to Ohrid from the position of a cleric in the Great Church (Saint Sophia) in Constantinople. The Archbishops Theodulus (1056-1065), John II Lampin (1065-1078) and John III Ainos (1078-?) were chosen from among the monks in Constantinople. John IV Komnen (1143-1160) originated from the royal family Komnens, and is the first Archbishop for whom there is written evidence that he had the title - Archbishop of Justniana Prima, and John V Kamatar (1183-1216) was a former emperor's clerk. According to Nilus Doxopater's testimony, the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric had the only liturgical right to ordain Archbishops. Often, the Bishops of the Ohrid Archbishopric were chosen from among the clergy of the Church of Constantinople.

The fact that the Archbishops and the other Bishops of the Ohrid Archbishopric were Greek only increases the importance and the influence of the Archbishopric. Firstly, because there is no doubt about ethnophiletism being an ailment at that time; secondly, because the Archbishops chosen for Ohrid were among the most educated and

most spiritual men in Constantinople (Theophilactus, Dimitrios Homatian (1216-1234) and others), and thirdly, because as Greeks, they could obtain more privileges from the Byzantine tsar for the mainly Slavic local inhabitants, than what they would if they were of Slavic origin themselves. Known are the letters by Theophilactus of Ohrid written to the tsar, sevastokrators and other authorities of the state about the injustice done to the local people while collecting taxes, as well as it is known that the people gained many privileges by the authorities after the intercessions of the Archbishops. Often, some of the Ohrid Archbishops, besides being Archbishops of Justiniana Prima, also had the title Archbishops of the whole of Bulgaria.

After the fall of Constantinople under the Latins and with the foundation of the new states on the territory under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric, autonomous churches were founded in the states which did not accept the jurisdiction either of Constantinople or of Ohrid. In the newly founded Second Bulgarian Kingdom of Peter (1185-1197) and Asen (1189-1196), a new Archbishopric was founded with its see in Trnovo. The Archbishop of Ohrid, Homatian, witnesses that the Bishop of Vidin, together with two other Bishops, ordained the Bulgarian priest Basil an Archbishop of Bulgaria. Later, when the Bishop of Vidin realized that a schism was created and when he repented, wanting to put the Archbishopric under Ohrid or Constantinople, he was slain. Kaloian (1197-1207) was trying to obtain recognition for the Bulgarian Archbishopric of Trnovo, but he could not demand recognition neither from the Patriarchate of Constantinople nor from the Ohrid Archbishopric, because he would not have got it, so he directly addressed Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), from whom he required an imperial crown, and a Patriarchal rank for the Archbishop of Trnovo. In November 1204, Kaloian received a royal crown from the Pope, and the Archbishop the title - Primas. With this act the Archbishopric of Trnovo acceded a union and was deprived of the unity with the Orthodox Church. Although he was trying, Tsar Kaloian did not succeed in putting the Ohrid Archbishopric under the jurisdiction of the Trnovo Archbishopric. Nevertheless, he managed

to expell Greek Bishops and put Bulgarian Bishops instead. Only the Archbishop could have been Greek, but it is not known how Kaloian behaved towards him was.

After breaking the union with Rome at the time of Ivan Asen II (1218-1241) because of known political reasons, the Archbishopric of Trnovo was granted autonomy, and in 1232 a contract was made according to which the Archbishop of Trnovo recognized the supreme authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch, by whom he received ordination. Later, when in 1235 the Bulgarian princess Hellen married the Greek heir to the throne Theodore, and because of the family relations between the Nicene and the Bulgarian Court, the Trnovo Archbishopric became a Patriarchate. The Bulgarian rulers were always aiming to raise the reputation of the Archbishopric of Trnovo above the reputation of the Ohrid Archbishopric and they were constantly trying to find a way to make it inferior to the Trnovo Archbishopric.

The division of Byzantium caused also a division of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Ever since, the pressure of the civil authorities, the bishops of the dioceses in Trapezunt and Epirus, started to ordain Bishops for the emptied dioceses, and began to deny the Patriarch of Nicea authority. This was strongly opposed by the Patriarch of Nicea, who, in fact, after moving from Constantinople to Nicea added himself the title Ecumenical Patriarch. The Byzantines believed that a kingdom could not exist without a Patriarchate, and this encouraged the other Greek rulers to establish church administrations in their states. The Archbishop of Ohrid, Homatian supported the bishops of Epirus greatly, which worsened the relationship between the Ohrid and Nicea church centres. At the request of Theodore the despot of Epirus, Archbishop Homatian crowned him a tsar. There was certain lack of communication between the Patriarch of Nicea and the Bishops of Epirus thereafter. The Archbishop Homatian admitted openly that he was governing the dioceses belonging to the Patriarchate of Constantinople temporarily and only because of the newly arisen situations. He allowed the Patriarch of Nicea to be mentioned in those dioceses and he used the first chance to reconcile with him. He wrote

a letter to the newly elected Patriarch Herman II (1222-1240) in which he completely avoided the schism. However, since the Patriarch Herman II thought that Homatian wished to become Patriarch of the West Byzantine Empire, he sent him a harsh letter in which he condemned the coronation of Theodore (1215-1224) and the chrism boiling, which according to Herman was only a Patriarch's privilege. The Archbishop Homatian answered this letter and wrote that he would not wish to justify himself on that account since no dogmatic or canonical error was done by boiling the chrism and anointing Theodore for a tsar. The letter which Archbishop Homatian sent to Patriarch Herman II did not improve their relations and it is unknown whether it led to schism, however the disputes soon calmed down. During the time of Homatian, a conflict over the canonical issue of the Hierarchs ordained at the time of Kaloian emerged. Therefore, a Council of Bishops was held at which this issue was looked into. From the act passed at this Council it is obvious that a decision was made that the Bulgarian Bishops should leave the dioceses. The conflict was solved and further conflicts were avoided.

The Latin conquests in the Crusades, the founding of the Bulgarian and the Serbian states, reduced the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric immensely, but yet it did not disappear. During the time of Archbishop Homatian, the autocephaly of the Archbishopric was confirmed with the act of anointing the despot of Epirus, Theodore Komnen, a tsar and in a correspondence with the Patriarch, who because of the Latin occupation of Constantinople was in Nicea, he argued that boiling of chrism for anointment was a right of the Archbishops of Ohrid ever since the time of tsar Justinian, who raised Justiniana Prima at the rank of an Apostolic Church. Its successor is the Ohrid Archbishopric. Although with a greatly reduced jurisdiction during the Kingdom of Epirus, the Ohrid Archbishopric was a well-organized autocephalous church at least on the territory of the kingdom, with a probably better organization than at the time of its splendor in Samuel's Kingdom.

After Michael Paleologus (1259-1228) took over Constantinople in 1261, the Archbishop of Ohrid, Constantine Kabasylla (1255-1259

and 1260-1282), who had been imprisoned by the Emperor Theodore Laskaris II (1254-1258), was freed from prison and the tsar allowed him to sit at the Archbishop's cathedra. This emperor helped the Archbishopric and respected it highly. This attitude towards the Archbishopric was positively used by Archbishop Jacob Proarchius (1275-1285) who reminded him of the privileges of the Archbishopric given with Basil II's chrysobulls so that those would be re-established. The emperor accepted this proposal and, in 1272, Michael Paleologos gave the Archbishop of Ohrid a chrysobull. In that chrysobull, Justinian and Basil II were presented as founders of the same Archbishopric. It is also said that Basil II Bulgaroktonos's chrysobulls were annexed to that chrysobull.

The spreading of the Serbian state to the south reached its final regions at the time of tsar Stephen Dushan (1331-1355). The year when Stephen Dushan occupied Ohrid is unknown, but most probably it was around 1334. Tsar Dushan respected the chrysobulls that the Byzantine emperors issued to the Ohrid Archbishopric and, practically, he did not take anything under its jurisdiction. As a founder of the monastery Treskavetz, he issued three chrysobulls; the first chrysobull gave it the right to manage properties in Prespa and Florina; and in the second chrysobull he called Ohrid προκαθήμενον i.e. the one which presides in the area where the monastery Treskavetz was located. Certainly, if tsar Dushan did not consider Ohrid a town where the presiding, that is, the Archbishop of the Ohrid Archbishopric lived, or if he believed that he was subordinated to the Serbian Archbishop of Pec, then, he would not have called Ohrid a presiding town.

Stephen Dushan was a pious ruler. He passed a law according to which all conquered towns were guaranteed all the privileges that they had had under the rule of the Emperor of the Romaions. Both Ohrid and the Ohrid Archbishopric retained those privileges. During the time of tsar Dushan, the Bishops of the Ohrid Archbishopric were elected only by the Assembly of Bishops, they were not elected in Constantinople and only ordained in Ohrid, as it had been the case so far.

In April 1346 tsar Dushan summoned a church council in Skopje where the Patriarch of Trnovo Symon and Nicolas (1346-?) the

Archbishop of Ohrid proclaimed the Serbian Archbishop Ioannikios (1337-1354) a Patriarch. The Archbishop of Ohrid was proclaimed a honorary member of the Synod of the Serbian Church by tsar Dushan. Tsar Dushan had three goals regarding the Church: 1) to strengthen Orthodoxy in his kingdom, 2) to improve the reputation of the priests among the people and, 3) to guarantee the material welfare of the Church. During this period, the relationship between the Ohrid Archbishopic and the Patriarchate of Constantinople is unknown.

There are not many records about the mutual relations between Dushan's heir, his son, tsar Ourosh V (1331-1355) and the Archbishop of Ohrid, but probably, at that time, the Ohrid Archbishopric retained all its previous privileges. After the fall of Dushan's kingdom, the Ohrid Archbishopric remained autocephalous. Its jurisdiction spread through different states: 1. The kingdom of Volkashin, and later of his son Marco, on whose territory the town of Ohrid was located, 2. the despotate of Hlapen, 3. the kingdom of Simon in Epirus and south Albania, 4. the kanin-avlon despotate, 5. the principedom of Elbasan and 6. the despotate of Velbuzhd. In 1367, the Patriarch of Constantinople Philoteos (1354-1355 and 1364-1376) invited the Archbishop of Ohrid with his subordinated Hierarchs at the Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, which to be held two years later, at which the reuniting of the Eastern and Western Church would have been discussed. The invitation notified him that the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem were already in Constantinople, and the Patriarch of Antioch was notified and expected to appear at the council. With the same invitation the Archbishop of Ohrid was explained that in case he did not participate at the council he would show great disrespect and he would offend the Patriarchs, and if he did come, His Holiness (the Archbishop of Ohrid) and the Christians with him would have a great use, honour and glory. "Thus, let His Holiness, the Archbishop come here, after he subordinates everything else to this matter", with these words the Patriarch of Constantinople ended the letter, which show that the Archbishop of Ohrid was regarded at the same rank with the Patriarchs at that time as well. For one thing, because of the reputation and the tradition of au-

tocephaly, and another thing is, because of the great political disunity among the despots and the sebastocrators who governed the territory under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric after the fall of Dushan's Kingdom, which at the time was not subordinated either to the Patriarch of Pec or to the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Yet, during the Serbian reign, the Ohrid Archbishopric had the narrowest borders from the time of its founding. Most of its territory, which was previously under its jurisdiction, was lost as regards the north. Thus, its northern border went past Debar and Kitchevo, not far from Ohrid, over the Mokren mountains it descended towards the Adriatic Sea to the Avlon Bay. To the south-west the border passed by the rivers Voiusa and Bistritza, over the town Servia and rising towards the north-east, it left the town Veria under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. It continued towards the field of Thessalonica and Giannitza - Lake Vardar, rising slightly towards the north and passing Vardar it included the diocese of Strumitza, then it returned towards west and again it passed Vardar under Veles, which was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Pec. From the dioceses belonging to it previously, only the following remained: Ohrid, Kostur, Greven, Meglinis, Slanishka, Strumitza, Pelagonia, Devol or Selasphor, Glaven, Kanin and Wallach. After the fall of Dushan's kingdom, the Ohrid Archbishopric slightly expanded towards north and south, so that the following dioceses entered its territory: Prizren, Skopje, Debar, Seres, Drama and Christopolis (Cavalla), but most probably, it also expanded towards east with the towns: Velbuzhd (today's Kustandil), Jumaia and Razlog.

4. Since the Time of Turkish Conquests on the Balkan Peninsula until the Abolition of the Archbishopric in 1767

In 1371, the Turkish Army defeated king Volkashin (1366-1371) and despot Ouglesha's Army, who at that time ruled with part of the territories under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. Since then, they were forced to pay the Sultan taxes, and to give him their armies in the times of war. In 1392 the Turks conquered Skopje and after the deaths of king Marco (1371-1394) and despot Constantine of Velbuzhd, they finally conquered the whole territory which they administrated with. Thus, in 1408, Ohrid was under Turkish rule. Still, the Turks did not reach after the Ohrid Archbishopric, mostly because of their tolerance for monotheistic religions and left the people to govern themselves regarding religion. They sufficed that Christians and members of other monotheistic religions were loyal to the authorities and the state administration.

After the fall of the Trnovo Patriarchate, some of the dioceses under its jurisdiction entered the Ohrid Archbishopric. Thus, in the beginning of the XV century, the Archbishop of Ohrid, Mathew (1408 is mentioned), attached the dioceses of Sophia and Vidin to the Ohrid Archbishopric. By showing the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel Paleologos (1391-1425), previous Byzantine emperors' chrysobulls regarding the jurisdiction and privileges of the Ohrid Archbishopric, he managed to provide a chrysobull which gave him not only the right to govern the dioceses of Sophia and Vidin, but also to obtain dioceses predicted for the Ohrid cathedra in the chrysobulls of his predecessors. After a certain period of time, the Patriarchate of Constantinople opposed this. It held the position that before the founding of the Patriarchate of Trnovo, the dioceses of Sophia and Vidin were under its jurisdiction. Thus, after a while, the Patriarchate succeeded in taking away the two aforesaid dioceses from the Ohrid Archbishopric. This led to cooling down in the relations between the Patriarchate and the Archbishopric, which were quite good until then. There was a culmination, even an interruption in the relations, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople entered a union with the Roman-Catholic Church at

the Council in Florentia (Florence) in 1439. The Ohrid Archbishopric was one of the greatest opponents to the union. Not until after the fall of Constantinople under Turkish rule in 1453, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople did not support the union anymore, the communication was renewed. In 1466 the former Patriarch of Constantinople, Marco Xilokarav (1466-?) came to be Archbishop of Ohrid.

In the XV century, dioceses from the other side of the Danube, from the Dukedoms of Wallachia (Hungarian-Wallachia) and Moldova, fell under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. The aforesaid areas, which are identified with Mediterranean and coastal Dacia, were mentioned even in 11th Justinian's novella as areas belonging to Justiniana Prima Archbishopric, which was identified with the Ohrid Archbishopric. This was repeated in Mathew Vlaster's syntagm, which in the XV century, in Moldova, was treated as an official canonical codex. The Archbishops of Ohrid succeeded in putting Wallachia and Moldova under their jurisdiction towards the middle of the XV century, and the greatest contribution to this was the fact that the Ohrid Archbishopric sharply rejected the Florentine union. Thus, at the request of the Duke of Moldova Alexandrel, in 1452 or 1453, Nicodimus, the Archbishop of Ohrid, ordained Theoktistos a Metropolitan of Moldova. Towards the end of the 60s in the XV century, the Dukedom of Wallachia completely became part of the Ohrid Archbishopric. Nevertheless, this did not last for more than a hundred years. The Patriarchate of Constantinople gave the Dukedom of Moldova autonomy towards the end of the XVI century. The Local Synod elected Metropolitans, and the Patriarch of Constantinople only confirmed them. Also, the Metropolitan i.e. the Primate of the autonomous Church was obliged to mention the Ecumenical Patriarch, and to get the holy chrism from him.

In accordance with the Turkish authorities, between 1453 and 1466 the territories under jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Pec were attached to the Ohrid Archbishopric. Towards the end of 1529 or the beginning of 1530, the Bishop of Smederevo, Paul, supported by some Serbian dignitaries and with the Turkish authorities, whom he had

bribed with money, separated the Pec diocese and some other dioceses from the Ohrid Archbishopric and proclaimed the Church of Pec independent. He was defrocked and excommunicated by the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric together with the bishops he ordained, and this decision was accepted by all eastern Patriarchs. Paul did not accept that decision, he continued working as an independent Archbishop of Pec and he even named himself a Patriarch. He appointed Bishops in Lesново and Kratovo, and he probably put Ohrid under his authority after he had put Archbishop Prochor (1528-1550) with all his clerks and some Metropolitans in prison by bribing and slandering. After Archbishop Prochor was released from prison, he managed to go to Constantinople and acquire a firman (edict) from the Sultan which ordered the the Ohrid Archbishopric be given its previous borders and a council to be summoned in Ohrid, at which Paul would be judged. Paul appeared at the Council in 1541 but he was rude and unrepentant. The Council confirmed the decision for his defrocking, defrocked the bishops ordained by him, and threatened the clerics who would officiate with them, as well as, all those laymen who would accept their religious services with excommunication and an anathema. That decision was confirmed by Michael (1523-1541), the Patriarch of Antioch, and Herman (1537-1579), the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Right after the fall of Ohrid under Turkish rule, a qadi, who was a mediator between the Turkish authorities and the Archbishopric, was appointed. If a new Bishop or an Archishop was elected, it was necessary to obtain a berat (a royal decree by which a clerk was appointed and his competences were determined) by the Sultan. The bishops' rights were regulated by these berat and they were issued for each person separately. In case the Sultan was replaced, all the church's dignitaries were obliged to renew their berat in order to be able to carry out their duties. In order to obtain a berate high taxes (peshkesh) had to be paid. However, obtaining a berat brought on great misuses, which was quite demeaning for the Church. The Bishops' berat were given by the local qadis, and not by the Archbishopric. Archbishop Prochor succeeded in preventing this crime. He received a

firman by the Sultan, by which the right of issuing a berate for clergymen was regulated. So, no person was able to be issued a berate only by the local qadis, but only by the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric and Ohrid's qadi. Thus the problem with the misuses was solved, for it had happened that certain bishops were removed from the cathedrae unjustly and their posts were taken by those who paid more.

Towards the end of the XV and the beginning of the XVI century, the Ohrid Archbishopric expanded its jurisdiction even over territories in Italy (Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, Venice, as well as in Dalmatia - towns which consisted the Italian Diocese). The flock of this diocese was made of Greeks and Albanians, and it increased after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople and Albania. The Pope viewed this jurisdiction with hostility and many times he attempted to take over the dioceses in Italy, which were under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric, under his jurisdiction. So, in 1556, the orthodox Bishop Pamphilus was forced out of Mesina.

With the founding of the Patriarchate of Pec in 1557, the status of the Ohrid Archbishopric weakened even more. The Patriarch of Pec, Macarius (1557-1572), brother of the grand vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolovitch, separated many dioceses from the Archbishopric and joined them to the Patriarchate. After the decease of Archbishop Prochor in 1550, Bishop Simon of Rashka (1550-?) was elected his successor. Just as Prochor, Simon was a Slav by origin. Nevertheless, from the acts preserved from that time, one could see that Simon lead the correspondence of the Archbishopric in Greek. One can presume with great probability that at that time the Greek bloc in the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric was very strong, and it managed to impose the abbot of the monastery Xenofont from the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos), who was of Greek origin, to be Metropolitan of Skopje, as opposed to the candidates of Slavic origin. Simon was removed just half a year after he became an Archbishop. After the decease of Archbishop Nikanor (1557 is mentioned), Simon's successor, the throne of Ohrid was widowed, so the Patriarch of Pec, Macarius, managed to join more dioceses to the Patriarchate of Pec, which were so far under

the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. In the middle of the XVI century, the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric in Italy was shattered by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and by Vatican. Especially strong was the pressure from the Roman-Catholic bishops, who obstructed the bishops sent from Ohrid from fulfilling their duties. This is why, the Archbishop of Ohrid Gabriel I (1572 is mentioned) asked the Polish king Stephen Batorius to intercede for the interests of the Ohrid Archbishopric before the Pope, which he did with a letter dated on June 24th, 1586, asking the Pope not to obstruct the Archbishop of Ohrid in administration of the Greek municipalities in Sicily, Apulia and Calabria. However, he did not achieve success. In 1588, the orthodox clergymen in Sicily were summoned at the local Roman-Catholic council in Mesina and they were forced to accept a union. Some accepted the union, and some preferred to return east only to avoid accepting a union. Yet, it is known with great probability that in the beginning of the XVII century, the Ohrid Archbishopric lost the jurisdiction in southern Italy.

Towards the middle of the XVI century, the Ohrid Archbishopric lost the Diocese of Veria, however, at the beginning of the XVII century, it gained the Diocese of Durres from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Since then and until its abolishment in 1767, the Ohrid Archbishopric neither lost nor gained a diocese under its jurisdiction.

Almost during the entire period of the Turkish rule, the Ohrid Archbishopric was in a very difficult financial position. The various taxes imposed by the Turkish authorities were enormous. Not being able to pay them, the Archbishops of Ohrid had to go to Russia and ask for help from the Russian tsar. Many times, the Russian tsar helped materially both the Archbishops and their subordinate Metropolitans of the Ohrid Archbishopric. Apart from money, the help also consisted of vestments, items and books for religious services. But, some of the Archbishops were not satisfied with a single instance grants. Seeing the Russians as brothers in faith, they were trying to persuade the Russian tsars about their duty to give Christians not only material help, but to help them liberate themselves from the Turks. Thus, the Archbishop

of Ohrid Dionisius (1652 is mentioned) was persistent and he stayed in Moscow for 10 months and 5 days so that he would obtain certain promises and privileges from the tsar. When he was given help, he insisted before the tsar to be treated as an Archbishop who is superior to 17 Metropolitans and Bishops, and not as a simple diocesan Bishop. So, he was granted a bull (charter) with a silver seal, awarded for his persistence, which gave him the right to go to Moscow every 5 years to ask for charity. Besides Archbishops and Bishops, a lot of abbots and monks under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric went to Russia to ask for charity, because this was their only hope to save the monasteries.

Towards the end of the XVI and in the XVII century, some of the Archbishops of Ohrid, and some of the diocesan bishops, went to the western countries, and even to the Pope, to ask for charity. It is more than certain that their request for reception with the Pope was not because of their belief in or inclination towards the Roman-Catholic faith, but they were forced by their hopeless financial position. This can be seen from the fact that they never entered a union with the Roman Pope, although they were conditioned with this if they were to be given financial assistance. Besides material assistance, they asked the western countries rulers, especially the Spanish king, whom they trusted most of all, to help them with army and weapons to raise an uprising against the Turks and to force them out of Europe. In these efforts they faced the great hypocrisy of the western countries leaders as well as the Pope's hypocrisy.

The receiving of church ranks and offices by bribing the Turkish authorities was one of the greatest problems in maintaining the order, not only in the Ohrid Archbishopric, but also in the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and in other local churches, the territories of which were under the Ottoman Empire. There were often replacements of the Archbishops of Ohrid, just as there were of the Patriarchs of Constantinople but also of the bishops of the dioceses under their jurisdiction. At times, the Turks managed to cause rivalry between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and the Archbishops of Ohrid, from whose argu-

ments and disputes only the Turkish authorities profited. But, generally speaking, it can be said that 50 years before the abolishment of the Archbishopric, the relations between the two Churches were relatively good. In truth, it happened that some of the Patriarchs of Constantinople wished to widen their authority over the Ohrid Archbishopric's canonical area, but it was rare and incidental. It is also known that the Archbishops of Ohrid participated and had influence on the removal and appointment of some of the Patriarchs of Constantinople. For example, the Archbishop of Ohrid, Paisius (1565 is mentioned) presided over the Synod of Constantinople in 1565, when the Patriarch Joasaf (1556-1565) was removed. Three bishops from the Ohrid Archbishopric were part of the Synod.

It should not be forgotten that the communication and close relations between the two Churches were possible because, despite the existence of a wing of Bishops, so called autochthonists (Slavs, Wallachians, and Albanians), the language of officiation and administration in all dioceses in the Ohrid Archbishopric, just as during the previous historical epochs from the founding of the Archbishopric, remained to be Greek. Most of the Archbishops and diocesan Bishops were of Greek origin. Just a few Slavs, Albanians, or Wallachians succeeded in reaching an archbishop's or a bishop's throne. From the aforesaid facts, it becomes clear to the unbiased explorer that the rivalry and sometimes the intolerance which occurred between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and the Archbishops of Ohrid was not because of ethnophiletistic reasons, but because of personal aspirations for superiority or finding solutions for the difficult financial situation of the two Churches during Turkish enslavement. It is a fact that a few decades before the abolishment of the Archbishopric, it could be said that two parties occurred among the Bishops in the Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric. One was of phanariotes who inclined towards closer relations with the Patriarchate and wanted to weaken the autocephaly of the Ohrid Archbishopric, and the other was of the so-called autochthonists who wanted to strengthen the influence of the throne in Ohrid. Still, these cannot be treated as ethnophiletistic motives because the

problem of ethnophiletism in the Church did not yet exist at that time, but it appeared two centuries later. Until the XIX century there were no separations of the Orthodox Church caused by nationalistic impulses.

The division into phanariotes and autochthonists which occurred among the diocesan bishops of the Ohrid Archbishopric and, moreover, the difficult financial position of the Ohrid Archbishopric over a longer period of time, contributed to its abolishment in 1767. The Sultan signed the chatisherif (a Sultan's edict) with his own hand and adjoined all dioceses of the Ohrid Archbishopric to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the last Archbishop Arsenius (1763-1767) was forced to resign before the Patriarch of Constantinople, Samuel (1763-1768). The debts which the Archbishopric owed the Turkish authorities were taken on by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, just as a year before, the Patriarchate of Constantinople took on the debts of the Patriarchate of Pec after it was abolished in the same manner as the Ohrid Archbishopric, and its dioceses adjoined to the throne of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Towards 1530, the Ohrid Archbishopric had 32 dioceses, without the Archbishopric. There were 12 in Macedonia: Greven, Castoria, Strumitza, Meglenis, Bitola, Kitchevo, Debar, Polog, Skopje, Kratovo (or Morsovitz), Kustendil and probably Prespa too; then 5 in Albania: Korca, Avlon, Berat, Spat, Muzakia; 14 in the Serbian lands: Prizren, Novo Brdo, Budim, Novi Pazar, Pec, Cetinye, Herzegovina, Bosnia, Zvornik, Studenitza, Belgrade, Smederevo, Bela Crkva and Hungary; and in Moravia: the Diocese of Nish. After 1530, the Ohrid Archbishopric had two more dioceses: Veria and the Italian diocese. In the XVI century, the Ohrid Archbishopric lost its jurisdiction over the Metropolitanates: Sofia, Vidin and Moldova, which were part of it in the XV century, and with the founding of the Patriarchate of Pec, it lost jurisdiction over many territories in its northern part.

During the period of the Turkish rule, the level of education of the clergy of the Ohrid Archbishopric was not at the required level. This was certainly a consequence of the fact that during that

period most of the territories where Orthodox Christians lived were under Turkish rule. Not only in the Ohrid Archbishopric, but also in other local churches there was a lack of schools and teachers of theology. For the greater part of this period, the administrative and official language of the Ohrid Archbishopric was the Greek language. Only during the period of a small number of Archbishops did the Slavic language manage to enter the administrative and official practice, but only in parallel with the Greek, which until the abolishment of the Archbishopric was not out of administrative and ministering practice. Evidence for that is the numerous services to the local Saints of the Ohrid Archbishopric published in Greek, for example, the services of the Seven Saints, St. Clement of Ohrid, St. Nahum of Ohrid, the 15 Holy Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, St John Vladimir and others.

5. Since the Fall of the Ohrid Archbishopric under Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople until the End of the Balkan Wars

After the fall of the dioceses of the Ohrid Archbishopric under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Bishops of those dioceses were appointed by the Synod of the Patriarchate and the Patriarch of Constantinople. As in almost the whole period of its existence until its abolishment, on the territories which were previously under its jurisdiction, Greek remained the only official language. There is some truth in the fact that certain Greek Bishops insisted to completely suppress the Slavic language not only from the administration but from the services, too. Still, the whole political and historical atmosphere should be taken into consideration. During this period the Patriarchate had all the authorities to organize the church and educational life of the people under its jurisdiction. The reasons for studying the Greek language at school and the use of Greek in the Church can

be easily explained from the perspective of what we know today. The unity of the Christians in the faith was a good condition for them to organize and fight against their mutual conqueror, the Turks. Yet, that compactness would have been even greater if they had spoken a common language, understandable to all.

The Greek language had the authority to be the most famous and the most influential among the languages of the Christians, firstly because it is a language of the Gospel, a language of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and also a language of philosophy, strong enough to express the most subtle human experiences. On the other hand, all the Christians in the Ottoman Empire were treated as “rum millet” i.e. Romaions. Official language of the Romaions in the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantium, was the Greek language. It was an official language of communication of the citizens of Byzantium, whether they were Greeks, Arabs or Slavs. And the idea for reestablishment of Byzantium was almost never abandoned.

Nevertheless, the fact that after the abolishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric, only Greek was taught in the church schools and the church services were also only in Greek was not appealing to the flock of Slavic or Albanian origin. They preferred to study and officiate in a language comprehensible to them.

The first Slavic people among the peoples occupied by the Turks who succeeded in gaining independence from Phanar were the Serbs. After gaining political self-Government in 1830 the Metropolitan of Belgrade, who was Greek, was replaced by a newly ordained Metropolitan of Serbian origin, and his ordination was performed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1832 the Patriarchate of Constantinople gave the Metropolitanate of Belgrade autonomy. The Metropolitan was to mention the name of the Patriarch of Constantinople in the services, and the autonomous Metropolitanate of Belgrade was to take the holy chrism from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Nevertheless, the Greeks were the first who achieved church independence from Constantinople by proclaiming autonomy in 1830, immediately after they freed from the Turks some of the territories

of today's Greece. The Patriarchate of Constantinople recognized this autonomy in 1850. But, the Greeks did not require autonomy out of ethno-philistic reasons. After they had freed themselves from the Turks, they simply did not want to be governed by a church centre which was still under Turkish enslavement.

It probably cannot be said about the Serbs, as well, that they required autonomy from Constantinople out of ethno-philistic reasons. It was as unimaginable to them for the Church, on a liberated territory, to be governed by the Patriarch of Constantinople who was still in a city under Turkish rule.

Ethno-philistic reason for church autonomy had the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870. This is why this attempt for division of the Christians on an ethnic base was condemned as heresy at the Council in Constantinople in 1872.

After the founding of the Bulgarian Exarchate, the believers on the territory which was previously under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric needed to decide which jurisdiction to accept: the Patriarchate's or the Exarchate's. Thus, two cathedras were founded in the diocesan seats: one for the Patriarchate's bishop, the other for the bishop of the Exarchate. The Patriarchate did not withdraw its Metropolitans back, and the Exarchate appointed its own. In Ohrid, Bitola, Prilep, Veles, even today, our people make difference between the temples built at that time as Greek or Bulgarian. Churches under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate were called Greek and those under the jurisdiction of the Exarchate – Bulgarian. The smaller places and villages were mainly under one jurisdiction depending on what they had chosen.

The locals of Kilkis went even further and were not satisfied with the choice between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate, but in 1876 they entered a union with the Roman Pope. The believers of the Byzantine rite came from this union and they have their own Bishop in FYRO Macedonia today.

It is very similar to our present day, drawing its roots from the XIX century. Since then, in the XIX century, on some of the territories

previously under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric, there were both a canonical jurisdiction, the one of the Patriarchate, and a schismatic jurisdiction, the one of the Exarchate. In accordance with the eastern Patriarchs, at the Council of Constantinople on the 16th of September 1872, the Exarchate is proclaimed a schismatic Church, and the ethnophiletistic motive of its founding was condemned as a heresy. The Exarchate, which later proclaimed itself a Patriarchate, remained in schism with the fullness of the Orthodox Church for full 70 years. We will be free to say that, this schismatic mentality spread during the time of the Exarchate developed very deep roots, especially among the people who lived on the territory which was previously under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. The reason for this was because the main struggle between the canonical Church and the schismatics was on this territory. As we said, there were two jurisdictions in a same town and in a same place, and both were attacking each other while naming themselves Christian. Therefore it is not strange at all, as we will see later, that the schismatic mentality would appear later in 1967, when the so called Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC)² was self-proclaimed autocephalous.

Beside the church schools of the Patriarchate in which Greek was taught, now, the Exarchate opened church schools in which Bulgarian was taught. Be as it may, ethnophiletism is theologically the most senseless heresy which appeared in the Church, from which a more contradictory heresy developed, the one practiced today by the schismatics of the so called MOC. It consists of the following: although the schismatics in the MOC are not in unity with the Church and do not respect the church and canonical order, they moreover, we would say, fight against this canonical order, and yet they wish to be called a Church.³

² The Macedonian Orthodox Church is a schismatic organization and cannot be called a Church.

³ We wrote about the ecclesiological heresy of the schismatics in the FYRO Macedonia in another study. We explained in details why we deem that in the schismatic organization in FYRO Macedonia three types of ecclesiological heresy have already occurred. Here we will shortly notice that the first heresy is the destruction of the Church structure. Namely, after the persecution of the Metropolitan of Skopje, Joseph, by the communist authorities in the People's Republic of Macedonia in 1945, the Church on that territory was left without a Bishop until 1958. It is well known that a Church structure cannot exist and it cannot be considered a Church without a bishop. The second type of ecclesiological heresy

The Patriarchate of Constantinople refused to agree with the renewal of the Patriarchate of Pec, but somewhere towards the end of the XIX century it agreed to put Serbian Hierarchs in some of the dioceses which were previously under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. The first Serbian Bishop was in the Raska-Prizren diocese in 1896, and then in 1902 a Serbian Bishop was put in the Metropolitanate of Skopje. The Veles-Debar diocese had a Serbian Bishop not until 1910.

6. Since the Period of Territorial Divisions after the Balkan Wars until the End of World War II

With the territorial divisions after the First Balkan War in 1913, the territories which were previously under jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric were divided between several countries. The dioceses in Aegean Macedonia were temporarily and under certain conditions granted to the Metropolitanate of Athens. The dioceses in Pyrin Macedonia were previously usurped by the Bulgarian Exarchate.

Vardar Macedonia become territory of Serbia, but the dioceses on that territory stayed officially under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople until 1920. After the proclaiming of the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1918 there was a unification of all Churches on those territories in one united Serbian Orthodox Church. The Metropolitanate of Belgrade began negotiations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the dioceses in the future Vardar Banate in 1914, but it was finally given the dioceses with the Decision for autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1920, when, in fact, the Patriarchate of Serbia was canonically confirmed and accepted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Because the throne of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was widowed, the Tomos for autocephaly was

is ethnophiletism which is the main motive of self-proclamation of autocephaly of the so called MOC in 1967. The third type of ecclesiological heresy is today's organization of the schismatics in FYRO Macedonia, who consider the Church-Laity's Council (according to article 38 from the Constitution of MOC) as the highest church-governing and legislative body, which is completely contrary to the Church tradition which has the Assembly of Bishops as the highest authority. For further information

not until 1922. Beside the dioceses in Bosnia and Herzegovina which belonged to the Serbian Orthodox Church there are seven more dioceses in Southern Serbia and Vardar Macedonia which the Patriarchate of Constantinople left to the Patriarchate of Serbia mentioned in the Tomos. In Vardar Macedonia those were the following six dioceses: the Metropolitanates of Skopje, Veles-Debar, Pelagonia, Prespa-Ohrid, one part of the Metropolitanate of Voden, the Metropolitanate of Strumitza and the Diocese of Polyan. Those six Metropolitanates in the united Serbian Church were redistributed into four dioceses: the Metropolitanate of Skopje and the Dioceses of: Ohrid, Bitola and Zletovo-Strumitza, and later the Diocese of Ohrid and Bitola was formed from the Ohrid Diocese and the Bitola Diocese.

This was a time of bloom of the spiritual life of the Christians in the Vardar Banat, who in the period under Turkish occupation were in long-lasting regression. The famous Theological Seminary in Bitola was opened, in which, among the many renowned names of teachers the most renowned were: hieromonk Jovan (John) Maximovitch, later Bishop of Shanghai and hieromonk Justin Popovitch. Saint Nicolas (Velimirovitch) was a Bishop of Ohrid and Bitola and influenced greatly the spiritual bloom. Catechesis was introduced as a compulsory subject in the schools, and the Church published theological magazines.

This was stopped in 1941 when the Bulgarians occupied the Vardar Banate. The Metropolitan of Skopje Joseph and the Metropolitan of Zletovo and Strumitza Vicentius (Prodanoff), who was elected a Serbian Patriarch in 1950, were forced out. The Church was again under jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church, although it never appointed Bishops with a seat in Macedonia but Bishops from Bulgaria administrated the church in Macedonia.

see: Jovan (John), Archbishop of Ohrid, "Ecclesiological heresy of the schism of the religious organization in FYRO Macedonia", *Sobornost*, year VI, No. 16-18/2006, Skopje 2006; and John, Metropolitan of Veles, "The Theological and Historical Aspect of the Schism of the Church in the FYRO Macedonia and the Overcoming Thereof", in the book: *For the Kingdom to Come*, vol I, Ohrid 2005.

7. Since the Formation of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia until the Beginning of the Schism by the Schismatic Organisation

After the liberation from the fascist in 1945 there was no possibility for the Bishops from Bulgaria to administrate the dioceses in Vardar Macedonia. On the other hand, the communists did not allow the expelled canonical Hierarchs: the Metropolitan of Skopje Joseph and the Bishop of Zletovo and Strumitza, Vicentius, to return. Thus, the Church on the territory of the then People's Republic of Macedonia was beheaded.

Because the Orthodox Church is Episcopal, without a bishop, it structurally cannot exist. Disregarding this essential fact, aiming to keep the Church under control, the communists initiated a Church-Laity's Council in 1945, which in the canonical area of the Orthodox Church cannot be legitimate because no Orthodox Bishop was present at the Council. The presence of the president of ASNOM (Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Macedonia) himself, representatives of the army and the political life are clear evidence that the initiative was more of political than of Church character. This clarifies, why the Serbian Orthodox Church proclaimed that Church-Laity's Council uncanonical at the Bishop's Conference summoned on the 12 March 1945, since it was not summoned by a canonical Bishop, which is certainly a necessary condition for its legitimacy. The conclusions from that people's council do not give a clear image if autocephaly or autonomy was requested by the Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia.

The antichurch and uncanonical order in the People's Republic of Macedonia probably did not begin at the time of the first Church-People's Council but at the moment when it was forbidden to mention the names of the canonical and recognized bishops at the liturgy. Schism is nothing else but loss of communion with the Bishop and God. Thus, a situation occurred, in which the rights of the bishop given by the Church canons were seized by some "Steering Committee".

This Council transferred and sent priests, who did not support absolute autocephaly of the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia, to the worst parishes. Under an immense pressure by the godless communist authority, the Metropolitan of Skopje Joseph was quietly discharged, although he did not lose his title. The Patriarch Vicentius became an administrator of all the dioceses in Macedonia. But an even greater pressure was put on the vicar-bishop Dositheus, with a title of Toplitza, who was a Serb on his mother's side, but was born in Vardar Macedonia. The pressure put over him by the communists is not an excuse for his non canonical act. Namely, he was invited to take part at the Church-People's Council scheduled for 4 October, 1958 in Ohrid. There, with a completely non canonical procedure he was elected an Archbishop of Ohrid and Skopje and Metropolitan of Macedonia. It is uncanonical that no canonical bishop of the Orthodox Church was present or took part in that, and also it is equally important or even more important that this election is in fact usurpation of someone else's cathedra.⁴ At the ordination, the insignia were given by a priest, the sceptre by a layman. The act of Dositheus' journey from Belgrade to the People's Republic of Macedonia was performed as an utmost secret. If it was not uncanonical, what was the reason for such great secrecy?

The Bishop Dositheus was previously promised that the Government of SFRY would compel the members of the Assembly of Serbian Orthodox Church not to raise a church-court procedure against Dositheus. Actually, the pressure of the godless communist authorities was consisted of precisely this, to convince the members of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church not to undertake a court procedure against the uncanonical act of the Bishop Dositheus.

From the ecclesiological-canonical aspect, the Church-Laity's

⁴ It should be underlined that Patriarch Herman (1958-1990) administered the dioceses in People's Republic of Macedonia. so, the election of the Vicar Bishop of Toplitza kyr Dositheus for a diocesan Archpriest in People's Republic of Macedonia was completely uncanonical. The Canons provide the most severe punishment for such an act : release, i.e., defrocking. Ref. : 15th Canon of the I Ecumenical Council, 17th Canon of the V – VI Ecumenical Council, 16th of the Antiochian Synod.

Council in Ohrid, held on 4 October 1958, is completely illegitimate. However, under the great pressure of the authorities, the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, held from 3 to 19 June 1959, succumbed and accepted part of the decisions, with which it practically granted autonomy to the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia. From this perspective, it is difficult to judge how wrong the Assembly was to have accepted decisions from an uncanonical council. Yet, the Bishop Dionisius from the American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, over whom the communists could not exert pressure, did not accept the decisions of the Assembly with which the Serbian Orthodox Church gave legitimacy to the completely illegitimate Church-Laity's Council.

Soon after the ordination of two more Bishops in the People's Republic of Macedonia, it could be seen why the Government put such a pressure that the Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia got autonomy. On 16 July 1960, the Metropolitan Dositheus informed the Patriarch Herman that a first Macedonian church is being raised in Windsor, Canada and Columbus, Ohio, and on 17 November 1960 he informed him that a delegation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) visited Australia and the Bishop of Zletovo and Strumitza Nahum consecrated a church in Melbourne. This provoked a reaction from the Ecumenical Patriarcha, under the jurisdiction of which are the Greeks in Australia and the Ecumenical Patriarchate Athenagora, who, just as a reminder, was an archdeacon in the Church of St. great-martyr Dimitrios in Bitola, and on 1 February 1961 in a letter he asked the Patriarch Herman who was this Bishop who consecrated a church to the Christians who "are almost all from Greece and accordingly have one more reason to belong to the canonical jurisdiction of the Greek Archbishopric for Australia and New Zealand"? Actually, the Steering Committee of the People's Republic of Macedonia of that time, insisted on an autocephalous Church, not because it liked the Church so much, but in order to be able to organize church municipalities in the diaspora and to control the same through it, for most of the people in the diaspora were anti-communists, so the state had no other mechanism to control them except through the Church.

The Government of the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugo-

slavia (SFRY) had two goals regarding the Church. One of them, which was directly conducted by the Steering Committee of the People's Republic of Macedonia, was to use the Church for political purposes. It was to control the Diaspora through the Church. The other was the one of Tito and the Steering Committee of the SFRY, to reduce the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church and gradually degrade and destroy it. There is no other explanation for the fact that the communists, who destroy the churches everywhere around the world, and here in Yugoslavia, more particularly in the People's Republic of Macedonia, they had created a Church. Through the separation of the Church, they actually wanted to destroy it, because everyone knows that this is the ideology of communism.

Before the regular session of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the president of the Executive committee of Serbia, Dragi Stamenkovitch, summoned the Patriarch Herman to a reception with the Executive Committee, on 5 May 1967, in order to compel him into granting autocephaly to the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia.

In the decision of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, where the request by the MOC to be an autocephalous Church is rejected, among the other arguments the following also stand: insufficient number of Bishops, insufficient number of priests in regard to the existing church parishes and religious buildings, temples and monasteries, lacking church - educational institutions and similar, and it is said that the MOC does not even have a Hierarchy "capable enough to guide the Church". This is probably the most important condition for achieving autocephaly. The mother Church, the one that gives the autocephaly, should trust the Bishops of the Church to whom it is to grant autocephaly. All other conditions are additional. If there is not enough conviction that the people who ask for autocephaly have sufficient responsibility, but also capability and knowledge to manage the autocephaly, then all external conditions are not enough. And the level of needed responsibility of the Bishops of MOC was shown around the events of expelling the Metropolitan of Veles and Vardar Valley, our humbleness, from his cathedra, in July 2002, after the accession of his Metropolitanate to the liturgical and canonical unity with Serbian Orthodox Church. The Synod

of MOC reached an utterly uncanonical and unconstitutional decision, even according to their Constitution, to relieve the Metropolitan Jovan (John) of the duty diocesan Bishop of the Metropolitanate of Vardar Valley without a Church trial and conviction, by means of political methods, using police force and with a gun pointed at his head, thus continuing to do unforgivable sins towards the Church of God, just as the one with the schism which cannot be washed even by the martyr's blood.

Unfortunately, the Church-Laity's Council held from 16 to 19 July 1967 in Ohrid, in a putschist way, consistently with the previous church-laity's councils, which means completely uncanonically and without any connection to the doctrine of the Church, proclaimed autocephaly of the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia. To give such authority to a Church-Laity's Council, to proclaim or abolish autocephaly, is indeed an immense ignorance and lack of knowledge of the bishops present at that Church-Laity's Council. It is a bishop's highest authority, and not of some kind a of people's council, to take care of the faith. Nowhere in the Orthodox Church is possible for a people's council to have a greater authority on the issues of the faith and the church order than one of the Assembly of Bishops. Actually, it was a people's council of people who lived in a communist and atheist society, even if it was called Church-Laity's one, in which the Bishops are a minority (only four out of thirty four), were deciding about such an important subject as an autocephaly of a Church. Thirty-four people of the entire People's Republic of Macedonia decided to force the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia into a schism. This is utter totalitarianism concordant to the time in which they lived. However, not even the members of the Church-Laity's Council were convinced that their decision was valid and applicable. For if they were convinced in this, then why was it necessary for them to ask for recognition from the Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church?

The Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church immediately reacted at this at an extraordinary session on 14 September 1967, with an only item on the agenda: the Proclamation of autocephaly of the MOC, and it ceased every religious officiation and canonical communica-

tion with the Hierarchy in the People's Republic of Macedonia, calling the church in People's Republic of Macedonia a schismatic religious organization and obliging the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church to conduct a church court procedure against the culprits of the schism. In the rationale of the decision of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church it was said that the proclamation of autocephaly was not only uncanonical, but also, opposed to the Constitution of MOC, because none of the Articles of the Constitution of the Macedonian Church predicts self-proclamation of autocephaly, or a proclamation of autocephaly by a certain Church-Laity's Council. It is noticeable that what is written in the Act No. 141 from 1967, in which it is reported that the MOC has proclaimed autocephaly is incorrect. Namely, the Ohrid Archbishopric was never autocephalous from the aspect of the present understanding of autocephaly and that it has never been a national Church of the Macedonian people. A proof for this is that the Archbishop of Ohrid, Theophanous (1676), was tried and convicted at an Assembly of the Patriarchate of Constantinople which was presided over by the Patriarch Dionysius IV (1676-1679), and that he was replaced by the Metropolitan of Sophia, Melenty. The Archbishops of the Ohrid Archbishopric, even those who were Slavs by origin, signed with: Prochor, by the mercy of God, Archbishop of I Justiniana, the Serbs, the Bulgarians etc; or Gabriel, by the mercy of God, Archbishop of I Justiniana, Ohrid and all Bulgarians, Serbs, Arbanahs, Moldowallachs etc., but, none of the Archbishops of Ohrid signed as Archbishop of Macedonia. They were not unfamiliar with the fact, it is said in the rationale of the decision of the bishops of MOC, that the People's Republic of Macedonia was not a state, but it was just a federal part of the state, with limited sovereignty. Stating the aforesaid conditions with a historical and political character relevant for acquiring autocephaly, the Bishops of MOC proved to be immature and unripe to guide an autocephalous Church. Another thing, also being of great importance, is that according to the Holy Scripture, "no one gives to himself honour" (Jews 5:4), and that: "no one can give the others more rights from the ones he has", which has already become an axiom in all the positive laws. Only an autocephalous Church has the right to give autocephaly to some of its parts. It is not possible for some part of an auto-

cephalous Church to proclaim autocephaly by itself for any reason given, and the least from an ethnophiletistic one. According to St. Basil (Canon I), all who deviate from the legal Church Hierarchy, damage the unity of the church, regardless of the fact that they teach as the Orthodox Church on the issues of the faith. In the end, what would become of the Orthodox Church if every ethnic group proclaims autocephaly?⁵

For this disintegration of the Church, comrade Tito gave the Metropolitan Dositeos a “medal with the flag of Yugoslavia with a ribbon”, and the remaining sisterly Orthodox Churches condemned the putschist act of proclamation of autocephaly without consent of the mother Church and they ceased the liturgical – canonical communication with the Hierarchy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

On 19 March 1968, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church implemented the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, from 15 September 1967, and reached the following decision:

“1. We put before the canonical Church court and we order raising charges against the culprits for creation of the schismatic religious organization in the Orthodox Church in Macedonia, as follows:

His Eminence the Metropolitan of Skopje kyr Dositeos,

His Reverence Bishop of Bitola kyr Clement,

His Reverence the Bishop of Zletovo and Strumitza kyr Nahum

The Vicar Bishop of Velitza kyr Methodius and

The Bishop of America, Canada and Australia kyr Cyril

2. We appoint as responsible for the procedure and the raising of charges, His Eminence the Metropolitan of Zhicha kyr Basil, who is to be given all the needed accusing material”⁶

One does not need to know much about the history of events from that period to conclude that the autocephaly of the MOC is a strictly political decision. The communists who destroyed the living Church everywhere in the world, turning the temples and monasteries into stables and warehouses, initiated and aided the schism in the People’s Repub-

⁵ All of the aforesaid is discussed in the rationale of : Act, Syn. No. 50/min. 7 dated on 15/2 September, 1967.

⁶ Act, Syn. No. 1150/min. 142 dated on 19 March, 1968.

lic of Macedonia for two reasons. First of all because only through the Church they could control the diaspora, which was of an utterly anti-communist disposition, and second, by creating and supporting a schism in the Church, they wanted to weaken it to its utmost limits so that they can destroy it more easily.

By reaching a political decision, the Steering Committee of People's Republic of Macedonia, most unnaturally, started to protect the Church from the Church. As if all the other Churches wanted to destroy the Church in the People's Republic Macedonia, and only the greatest "church-lovers", the communists, were trying to protect it. It went even further. The decision of the Executive Council of People's Republic of Macedonia was an unconstitutional act. In the SFRY of that time, the state was separated from the Church and every involvement of the state in the Church was an unconstitutional and unlawful act, according to the Elementary Law on the Position of the Religious Communities (Official Gazzette of the SFRY dated on 10 March 1965, No. 10 pg. 295). However, this unconstitutional support of the steering Committee of the People's Republic of Macedonia to the Church in People's Republic of Macedonia was urged, as we said before, by the highest authorities of Yugoslavia, and with the sole purpose of creating a schism, so that they could destroy the church more easily.

8. The Period of Shism and Final Overcoming Thereof

In the years between 1968 and 1977, one cannot say that there were talks about the overcoming of the schism as much as one can say that there were several meetings held under great pressure by the communist Government of that time, and all that just to give the impression that there were some talks so that the announced trial of the bishops of the MOC wouldn't happen. It was not until 1978 that there was a meeting of commissions of the Serbian Orthodox Church and MOC in the monastery of St. Prochor of Pchinya, held upon the request of the MOC, on 22 April 1977, for the recognition of the autocephaly thereof. The

commissions met for the second time on 17 and 19 September 1979 in the monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God in Kalishta near Struga, but neither the first nor the second time did the MOC repent for the committed uncanonical and putschistic act, so the talks failed.

On 20 May 1981, the Archishop Dositeos passed away. The newly-elected Archishop Angelarius, on 1 February 1982 by virtue of act No. 37, asked the Serbian Orthodox Church to recognize the autocephaly of the MOC, but the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in May the same year, decided negatively on the issue. Thus, the issue of recognizing the autocephaly of the MOC remained unresolved in the time of the Archishop Angelarius, who also asked recognition from the primates of the other Orthodox Churches, but received the answer that it was an internal issue of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In 1999, the Serbian Orthodox Church made several attempts to resume the talks with the MOC, but, because of many unresolved issues in the Synod of the MOC, the then current Archishop Gabriel avoided the meeting of the commissions. The first meeting of the two commissions happened on 3 March 1992 in Belgrade, and the discussions were resumed on 15 and 16 April in the monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God in Kalishta. However, just as the previous attempts, all was in vain. The Serbian Orthodox Church asked for repentance, and the MOC asked for autocephaly.

In the meantime, the FYRO Macedonia has gained independence on 8 September, 1991 by virtue of a referendum. After this, there were no official meetings neither at a level of the commissions nor at some other levels, until 1998, when our humbleness was ordained into a vicarious Bishop of the Metropolitanate of Prespa and Pelagonia. Only a month after our ordination, we managed to make a contact with His Beatitude, the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Christodoulos, and arrange a meeting of our delegation with him. At the meeting with the Greek Archbishop, which was first after many decades, due to the reason that none of the primates of the local Churches would receive the delegation of the MOC, we requested that the Archbishop would be an intermediary with the Serbian Orthodox Church for the MOC. This was arranged and

soon after that, the talks between commissions of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the MOC resumed. Thus, through negotiations we reached a very acceptable resolution, which is known as the Nis Agreement, because it was signed by the members of the commissions of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the MOC at the meeting in Nis, on 17 May 2002. The Agreement foresaw the resolution of two basic issues. The status of the Church in Macedonia would be autonomous and the name of the Church would be Ohrid Archbishopric. This was, basically, an optimal resolution because it is known that an autocephaly, produced in a putschistic manner, without having previously passed the status of autonomy is impossible, but also that the name Macedonian Orthodox Church cannot be accepted by all the Orthodox Churches when it is known that the greater part of Macedonia is in Greece and the Greek Churches do not agree only the territory of today's FYRO Macedonia to have the exclusive right to be called Macedonian.

Although the three Metropolitans of the MOC, the Australian Metropolitan Peter, the Metropolitan of Debar and Kitchevo Timothy and the Metropolitan of Strumitza Nahum signed it, they withdrew their signatures and gave up the Agreement under the pressure of the Government. Our humbleness did not take part in the session of the Synod, at which it was decided on the acceptance of the Nish Agreement, because we were on a pilgrimage through Greece with the students from the Faculty of Theology in Skopje. After we returned, after consulting some members of the Synod of MOC, we went to Belgrade at a meeting with the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church to try to find a solution for the newly-arisen situation. The best solution seemed to be that the Serbian Orthodox Church should send an individual summons to the Bishops, clergy, monastic and the faithful people in the FYRO Macedonia to approach the liturgical and canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church, and through it with all the Orthodox Churches. Even though we were personally promised by several other Bishops of the MOC that they will respond positively at the summons, our response, as a Metropolitan of the Holy Metropolitanate of Veles and Vardar Valley, together with the entire clergy and congregation, remained alone. On 22 June 2002, by virtue of

a written decree from the Serbian Patriarch kyr kyr Pavle (Paul) (1990-), we were admitted into liturgical and canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and through it with the entire orthodox ecumene. Yet, on 6 July 2002, after the decision of the Synod of Bishops of the MOC from 5 July 2002, according to which Jovan (John) was relieved “of the duty diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Vardar Valley”, the police of the FYRO Macedonia, contrary to the Constitution of the FYRO Macedonia, according to which the Church is separated from the state, effected the decision of the Synod of the MOC and expelled us from the residence of the Holy Metropolitanate of Veles and Vardar Valley.

The first liturgy of unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and through it with the entire Orthodox Church was in the monastery Koporin, at the 600th anniversary since the erection of the monastery, together with the Patriarch of Serbia kyr kyr Pavle (Paul), the hosting Bishop of Branitchevo Ignatius and other visiting Bishops. This was practically a seal on the liturgical and canonical unity, which, because of unwanted events related to our persecution, happened on 1 August 2002, more than a month after the written announcement for our acceptance into unity.

After they realized that there is no likelihood for things to change soon and that the rest of the episcopate of the schismatic Church in FYRO Macedonia has no intention to respond to the summons of the Patriarch Pavle (Paul), the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church decided to call an extraordinary Assembly of Bishops to discuss the given issue. The Assembly took place on 23 and 24 September 2002 in the Patriarchate in Belgrade and it was decided that our humbleness is granted the title Exarch of His Holiness the Patriarch of Serbia and the throne of Ohrid, together with the existent title Metropolitan of Veles and Vardar Valley. This means that we were given a canonical possibility to administer the dioceses in the FYRO Macedonia and to officiate and organize the religious life in it.

After the Holy Synod of Hierarchs realized that the schismatic Hierarchy of MOC had no interest to accede the unity with the Orthodox Church, at the Council in May 2003, two more Bishops were chosen for the Ohrid Archbishopric, Ioachim with a title Bishop

of Velica and Marco with a title Bishop of Dremvitza and they immediately became administrators of the emptied dioceses in the FYRO Macedonia. Thus, conditions for foundation of the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Ohrid Archbishopric were fulfilled. On the 25 of December 2003 the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Archbishopric was constituted.

Immediately after that in January 2004 almost all of the monastics, monks and nuns, who were previously part of the schismatic organization MOC entered the canonical Ohrid Archbishopric. For this reason, on the same day the Government of the FYRO Macedonia put us in prison and accused us of a crime “instigation of national and religious hatred, discord and intolerance” and the police threw all the monks and nuns out of the monasteries. After nearly a month in prison they released us, a few months later they sentenced us to two and a half years in prison which we served from 2005 to 2007 in the prison Idrizovo in Skopje.

From the beginning of 2004 after forming the Holy Assembly of Hierarchs and when the monastics joined the canonical church, difficult times for the Bishops, clerics and faithful people of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric came. In February 2004 the authorities sent five men wearing masks and weapons to attack the monastery St. John Chrysostom, our present residence; and after they robbed it, they burnt it and cut the nuns’ hair. Few months later with a decision by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, with an enormous number of armed policemen our monastery church was demolished. The Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups the same 2004 refused to register the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric. That enabled the police to maltreat not only the Bishops and the priests but the faithful people of the canonical Church also. With no court warrant, the policemen entered Christians’ homes and searched the houses like bandits; and they often even took things which were never returned. In the presence of the police, a mob paid by the schismatic organization in July 2005, demolished the chapel of St. Nectarius of Aegina in Skopje.

On May 24, 2005, the Serbian Patriarch Paul, in accordance with the Nis Agreement confirmed the election of our humbleness for an Archbishop of the Ohrid Archbishopric with a title: Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, and on the same day, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued the Tomos of autonomy of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric.

With everything that the authorities of FYRO Macedonia undertook against the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric it proved that it is totalitarian and undemocratic. There was such persecution of the Church during the time of communism, not in the FYRO Macedonia, but in the other communist countries. In FYRO Macedonia, the communist led a more vulgar fight. It seemed that they supported the Church, because they created it, but they did this to destroy the Serbian Orthodox Church by means of an internal schism.

Nevertheless, the Church rests on testimony, that is, martyrdom. For all important moments which marked the history of the Church people had to witness and suffer. Thus, this unity has to be suffered for as well. And then it will be sealed.

We pray to God who appeared in Trinity to be our helper. With His help one can bear the most difficult burden lightly.

Glory, honour and veneration to Him both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

On the Feast of St. Theophilactus the Archbishop of Ohrid,
on 31/13 December/January 2006/2007
Idrizovo Prizon near Skopje

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