INTRODUCTION

As the studies included in this volume make clear there is more to Orthodoxy than Byzantium and the Byzantine church, and for medievalists in particular it is salutary to be reminded not simply of the immensity of the Orthodox world, but of those mutations of Orthodoxy which find all too little space in this volume, or in other recent studies of relations between east and west. In a further detailed study of the Acacian schism, and an examination of the visit of archbishop Arsenios to Scotland in the eighteenth century, there are hints of these wider perspectives, but for the most part, and inevitably, these studies deal with aspects of the mainstream topics in this area of discussion. Western knowledge, and misunderstanding, of the Greeks and their language in the age of Gregory the Great, Grosseteste and the first and fourth crusades are the subjects of four particular studies; the influence of the east in the west, in political matters, ritual, liturgy and spirituality, the themes of five more. The Orthodox world, however, received as well as donated, and papers on the council of Constance and the election of an archbishop in the twentieth century demonstrate in microcosm the external political, ecclesiastico-political and, latterly, secular pressures to which Orthodoxy was subjected in the years of its material weakness and subjugation. These are matters which are considered at greater length in the medieval contributions of the president and professor Geanakoplos, and in Dr Zernov’s emotive discussion of the contemporary diaspora from holy Russia, that successor third Rome.

Professor Tappe’s study of Orthodoxy in Rumania is a further reminder that there was a Byzantine family of churches which was long to outlast its counterpart and initial condition, the imperial commonwealth of peoples, and to become willy-nilly its secular and political heir. The possibilities and dangers of such a situation are admirably indicated in a major reconsideration of the church in pre-independence Greece. But for all this political involvement it is as well not to forget that the strength of Orthodoxy has always lain in its spirituality: the president has remarked that the Byzantines were obsessively theological, while Dr Ware’s sympathetic portrayal of the fifth earl of Guilford gives an insight into those spiritual qualities and attractions which could convert a peer of the age of George III to Orthodoxy. Frederick North was renowned as a romantic philhellene, but as Dr Amand de Mendieta has shown in his magisterial account of
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Basil of Caesarea, Christian hellenism was an uncertain amalgam of the teachings of Christ and the philosophers, and the contradictions evident in the Cappadocian can be paralleled at many points in later Byzantine centuries—and in non-Byzantine lands and societies, for, as professor Brown has provocatively emphasised, in contrast to Dr Zernov, there was a mediterranean koine which blurs the distinctions so often made between east and west, and suggests, rather, a horizontal, north-south divide.

Whatever the distinctions made, however, and however the differences are categorised, it remains true that for the medieval west the Byzantine east was a world apart. There had indeed been ‘a parting of the ways’, and to westerners, then as later, the tale has appeared one of decline, and apparently inevitable fall. How far the fortunes of the empire comprehend those of the church, however, is a different matter. Auden succinctly defined the dilemma of the early Christians,

Knowing that as their hopes grew less
So would their heavenly worldliness,
Their early agape decline
To a late lunch with Constantine.1

The compromised attitudes and policies which proceeded from this concordat are too well-known to need rehearsing here. But the compromises necessary for the survival of an established church took different forms in east and west. For the Byzantines their empire and their church were coterminous. The one could not exist without the other. This myth was sustained to the bitter end, and it was not until the fifteenth century, during and after the collapse of their material world, that the Orthodox were left to live solely upon the resources of their spiritual capital. The Orthodox church none the less has shown a phenomenal talent for survival. It is the contention of the president that it developed some of that talent through its encounters with the Christians of the west and its resistance to those of its own emperors who wished to submit to the claims of the papacy in order to ensure the material security of their empire. The view that the Orthodox church has consistently gained strength through oppression and suffering is endorsed for the twentieth century by Dr Zernov, and empirically demonstrated by his first-hand account of the renaissance of Orthodoxy in his lifetime. Whatever the qualifications and caveats then, the basic theme of this volume is, as professor Nicol has declared, ‘the survival and the living continuity of the Orthodox tradition’.

1 New Year Letter (London 1941) lines 645-8.