THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Many causes have been proposed for the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Secular historians have naturally looked for material causes: the loss of Anatolia to the Ottoman Turks, with the consequent loss of manpower and economic resources; the handover of trade into the hands of the Genoese; the debasing of the currency; the feudal system, social unrest and the Black Death... Orthodox historians have gone deeper, proposing the divisions in the Byzantine commonwealth of States between the Slavs and the Greeks, or, most plausibly, the betrayal of the Faith at the Council of Florence in 1439...

And yet there is something not quite convincing about all these explanations. Or rather, while undoubtedly valid up to a point, they fail, individually and collectively, to explain why the Fall took place precisely at this time. After all, the Byzantines had suffered similar disasters on previous occasions. Anatolia had been lost to the Arabs in the seventh century, and again to the Seljuks in the eleventh century - but they had recovered. Before 1204 trade had been in the hands of the Venetians - but they had recovered. Social rest had been rife at the end of the Comnenan period, and again in mid-fourteenth century Thessalonica - but they had recovered. The Black Death afflicted many European states - but they had recovered. As for trouble with the Slavs, especially the Bulgarians, this was not new. And as for falls into heresy, these had been frequent and sometimes prolonged, as in the time of the iconoclasts, but both the Church and the Empire had recovered. There was no reason to believe that this fall into heresy was any deeper than previous falls - the unia of 1439 was rejected almost immediately by the people, and was officially rejected by the hierarchy in 1454 and again in 1484.

A clue to our conundrum is provided by an 8th or 9th century Greek prophecy found in St. Sabbas' monastery in Jerusalem, which says: "The sceptre of the Orthodox kingdom will fall from the weakening hands of the Byzantine emperors, since they will not have proved able to achieve the symphony of Church and State. Therefore the Lord in His Providence will send a third God-chosen people to take the place of the chosen, but spiritually decrepit people of the Greeks."¹ If we take this prophecy as God-inspired, as I believe we can, then we have the answer: Constantinople fell in 1453 because something fundamental in the relationship between Church and State went wrong in the Paleologan period - something which was presumably irreparable in the culture of late Byzantium, and which was so serious, according to God's righteous judgement, as to require the final Fall of the Empire itself...

¹ Archbishop Seraphim, “Sud’by Rossii” (“The Destinies of Russia”), Pravoslavnij Vestnik (Orthodox Messenger), № 87, January-February, 1996, pp. 6-7 (in Russian). Translated in Fr. Andrew Phillips, Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church, English Orthodox Trust, 1996.
But how? Had not the Church-State relationship almost always been in crisis in Byzantine history? How many emperors had not come to power through murdering their predecessors, or broken the laws of marriage in a particularly flagrant manner, or tried to impose heresy on the Empire, thereby stretching the Church-State relationship to breaking point? And how often have these manifest violations of Church-State symphony not elicited the charge of “caesaropapism” against the Byzantine imperial system as a whole? What was so sinister about the apparently peaceful relations between Church and State in the period before 1453 that called for so terrible and final a judgement?

The Slide to Absolutism

In order to attempt to answer these questions, let us go back to a time when Church-State relations in Byzantium were not caesaropapist but truly symphonic – especially by comparison with the West, where Pope Gregory VII and his successors had officially and triumphantly rejected the heretical doctrine of papocaesarism – the supreme authority of the Pope in both Church and State. For Emperor John Comnenus was in many ways an exemplary emperor, who put into practice the theory of Church-State relations that he expounded to Pope Honorius (1124-1130): “In the course of my reign I have recognized two things as being completely distinct from each other. The one is the spiritual power, which was bestowed by the Great and Supreme High Priest and Prince of the world, Christ, upon His apostles and disciples as an unalterable good through which, according to Divine right, they received the power to bind and to loose all people. The other thing is the secular power, a power directed towards temporal things, according to the Divine word: Give to Caesar that which belongs to him; a power shut up in the sphere belonging to it. These are the two dominant powers in the world; although they are distinct and separate, they act for their mutual benefit in a harmonious union, helping and complementing each other. They can be compared with the two sisters Martha and Mary, of whom the Gospel speaks. From the consensual manifestation of these two powers there flows the common good, while from their hostile relations there flows great harm.”

However, this letter marks the end of an era. For the later Comneni Emperors took it upon themselves not only to convene Church Councils, but even to take the leading part in them and punish hierarchs and churchmen who did not agree with them. Thus John’s successor, Manuel I, had the

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2 According to Ivan Solonevich, in 74 out of 109 Byzantine reigns, the throne was seized by a coup (Narodnaja Monarkhija (Popular Monarchy), Minsk, 1998. p. 77 (in Russian)).


following powers in the Church, according to the canonist Archbishop Demetrius Chomatianos: “He presided over synodal decisions and gave them executive force; he formulated the rules of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; he legislated on the ‘life and the statute’ of the clergy, including the clergy of the bema, and on the ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the elections to vacant sees and the transfer of bishops; he could promote a bishopric to the rank of a metropolia ‘to honour a man or a city’. The frontier thus traced annexed to the imperial domain several contested and contestable zones, but in the name of a right – that which gave the emperor his statute and his title of common epistemonarch of the Churches.”

The novelty here is in the term “epistemonarch”, whose meaning is obscure. However, even if the meaning of the term is obscure, the use to which the emperors used it – to justify their ever-increasing interference in ecclesiastical affairs – is not. Thus the first of the Angeli dynasty, Isaac, in a novella issued in 1187, justified his hearing complaints of bishops together with the patriarch on the grounds that he had received “the rank of epistemonarch of the Church from him who anointed him and made him emperor.”

Using this invented power, the Emperors tended to choose patriarchs who would be obedient to them. As George Acropolites wrote: “The Emperors in general want the patriarchs to be humble people, not greatly endowed in mind, who would easily give in to their desires as to law-giving decrees. And this happens all the more frequently with uneducated people; being ignorant in word, they are not capable of bold speaking and bow before the Emperor’s orders.” Similarly, Nicephorus Gregoras wrote that the emperors chose simple people for the post of patriarch “so that they may unhesitatingly obey their commands, like slaves, and so that they should not offer any resistance.”

And yet they did not always get their way. The extent, but also the limits, of the Emperor’s power were strikingly illustrated by a debate that took place towards the end of the reign of Manuel I. The Emperor convened a Council in order to strike out the following words found in the rite for the reception of Muslims to Orthodoxy: “Anathema to the God of Mohammed, about whom Mohammed says that... He does not beget and is not begotten, and nobody is like Him.” However, the hierarchy did not want to strike out this phrase. Then the Emperor “issued a second decree, in which he again insisted on his opinion and then appointed another Council in Scutari, where the Emperor had withdrawn because of illness to make use of the pure country air. Thither

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6 Dagron, op. cit, p. 261.
7 Acropolites, Chronicle, ch. 53; in Lebedev, op. cit, p. 99.
8 Gregoras, History of Byzantium, VIII, 2; in Lebedev, op. cit, p. 100.
the Emperor summoned the Patriarch and Bishops, but Manuel because of his illness could not enter into personal conversation with the Fathers: the matter was conducted through the Emperor’s beloved secretary. The latter in the person of the Emperor presented two papers to the Council. These were, first, a document in which Manuel set out his point of view on the question being debated, and secondly, his letter to the Patriarch. The Emperor demanded that the Bishops should sign the indicated document. And in the letter he in every way reproached the Patriarch and Bishops for their stubbornness and defiance, even threatening to convene a Council in which he wanted to entrust the presidency to none other than the Pope of Rome (it can be understood that the Pope in this letter served for Manuel only as a kind of scarecrow). In the same letter to the Patriarch the Emperor wrote: ‘I would be ungrateful to God if I did not apply all my efforts so that He, the true God, should not be subjected to anathema.’ But the Patriarch and Bishops even now did not want to share the Emperor’s opinion. On this occasion the noted Eustathius, Metropolitan of Thessalonica, spoke out with special zeal against the Emperor’s demands. He was a man of wide learning, distinguished by the gift of eloquence. He heatedly declared: ‘I would consider myself completely mad and would be unworthy of these hierarchical vestments if I recognized as true some Mohammedan God, who was his guide and instructor in all his disgusting deeds.’ The unusual boldness with which Eustathius began to oppose the Emperor horrified everyone. The hearers almost froze at these words of Eustathius. The Emperor’s secretary immediately set off to inform Manuel about his. The Emperor was indescribably amazed and considered himself deeply offended by Eustathius’ words. He said: ‘Either I shall justify myself and prove that I do not believe in a God that is the teacher of all impiety, and then I shall subject him who vomits blasphemy against the Anointed of God to merited punishment, or I shall be convicted of glorifying another God, and not the true one, and then I will be grateful that I have been led away from a false opinion.’ Patriarch Theodosius set off for the quarters of the Emperor, and for a long time tried to persuade him to forgive the act of Eustathius, and finally, to reduce the Emperor’s anger, promised that he, the Patriarch, and the Bishops would agree to accept the removal of the formula about the God of Mohammed from the trebniks. And apparently, the Council did in fact cease to oppose the will of the Emperor. Manuel was delighted, forgave Eustathius and sent the Bishops off to Constantinople in peace. But the Emperor somewhat deceived himself in his hopes. The next day, early in the morning, an envoy of the Emperor came to the Patriarch demanding impatiently that the Bishops should assemble and sign a decree of the Emperor. The Bishops quickly assembled at the Patriarch’s, but refused to sign the decree. Although, the day before, the Bishops, probably out of fear for Eustathius, had agreed completely to accept the opinion of Manuel, now, when the danger had passed, they again began to oppose the Emperor. They began to criticise the decree, found inaccuracies in it, began to demand changes and removals. Learning about this, the Emperor became very angry against the Bishops and showered them with indecent swear-words, calling
them ‘pure fools’. History does not record what happened after this. At any rate the end of the quarrel was quite unexpected: the historian Gregoras records the ending in only a few words. The Bishops, he says, somehow agreed to reject the formula which had enticed the Emperor, and replaced it with a new one, in which, instead of the anathema on the God of Mohammed there was proclaimed an anathema on Mohammed himself and on his teaching and on his followers.”

Now the Church herself began to find ways of justifying the emperor’s new power. Canonists were found – Patriarch Theodore Balsamon of Antioch (12th century) and Archbishop Demetrius (Chomatianos) of Ochrid (early 13th century) – who ascribed to the emperor all of the privileges of the episcopate except the conducting of church services and sacraments, but including the traditionally exclusively episcopal domain of teaching the faith. According to Balsamon, “the Orthodox Emperors can enter the holy altar when they want to, and make the sign of the cross with the trikiri, like hierarchs. They present catechetical teachings to the people, which is allowed only for local bishops.” “Since the reigning Emperor is the Lord’s Anointed by reason of his anointing to the kingdom, but our Christ and God is, besides, a bishop, similarly the Emperor is adorned with hierarchical gifts.”

According to Balsamon, as Dagron summarises his thought: “If the emperor acts in many circumstances as a bishop, this is because his power is dual. His dual competence, spiritual and temporal, can only be understood by the quasi-sacerdotal character of royalty, founded on anointing...

“The Church is subject to the authority of the emperor and that of the patriarchs. That is established. But what is the authority of the emperor based on? On his role as epistemonarch – that is, on the disciplinary function which he is recognised to have. Balsamon does not reject this explanation and uses it on occasion, for example, with regard to the right of appeal to the emperor in ecclesiastical matters, to show that the decisions of the patriarchal tribunal are without appeal in view of the loftiness of the see, but that the emperor in his capacity as epistemonarch of the Church will have to judge the patriarch if he is personally accused of sacrilegious theft (ιεροσβηλη) or heterodoxy...

“‘Insofar as the Emperor, through his anointing to the kingdom, is the Anointed of the Lord, while the Christ [= the Anointed One] and our God is, besides other things, also a Bishop, there is a basis for the Emperor being adorned with hierarchical gifts’. The reasoning is simple, albeit under a complicated form: the Anointed One par excellence, Christ, is qualified as bishop by us, so the emperors, who also receive anointing, must be equally considered to be bishops.”

10 Balsamon, Interpretation of the 69th Canon of the Council in Trullo, in Lebedev, op. cit., p. 97.
We see here how important the sacrament of royal anointing (although this anointing was not yet understood in a more than spiritual sense) had become - and how quite unorthodox conclusions were being justified by reference to it.

Chomatianos is hardly less clear than Balsamon in his caesaropapist views: “The Emperor, who is and is called the general supreme ruler of the Church, stands above the decrees of the Councils; he gives to these decrees their proper force. He is the standard in relations to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the lawgiver for the life and conduct of the priests, to his jurisdiction belong the quarrels of bishops and clergy and the right of filling vacant sees. He can make bishops metropolitans, and Episcopal sees – metropolitan sees. In a word, with the single exception of carrying out Divine services, the Emperor is endowed with all the remaining Episcopal privileges, on the basis of which his ecclesiastical resolutions receive their canonical authority. Just as the ancient Roman Emperors signed themselves: Pontifex Maximus, such should the present Emperors be considered to be, as the Lord’s Anointed, for the sake of the imperial anointing. Just as the Saviour, being the Anointed One, is also honoured as First Priest, so the Emperor, as the Anointed one, is adorned with the charismata of the firstpriesthood.”

Again, he writes that the transfer of bishops “is often accomplished at the command of the emperor, if the common good requires it. For the emperor, who is and is called the supreme watchman over church order, stands higher than the conciliar resolutions and communicates to them strength and validity. He is the leader of the Church hierarchy and the law-giver in relation to the life and behaviour of priests; he has the right to decide quarrels between metropolitans, bishops and clergy and fills vacant Episcopal sees. He can raise Episcopal sees and bishops to the dignity of metropolias and metropolitans… His decrees have the force of canons.”

Ostrogorsky characterises the ideas of Balsamon and Chomatianos as “merely echoes of old and antiquated ideas”. But these old ideas, dressed up in new, pseudo-canonical forms, were still dangerous... Thus Dagron writes: “Insensibly we have passed from one logic to another. The rights of intervention recognised by the Church for the emperor are no longer considered as exceptional privileges, but as a manifestation of the quasi-episcopal nature of imperial power. Taken together, they give the temporal power a particular status, and force one to the conclusion that if the emperor is not strictly speaking a cleric ‘after the order of Aaron’, he is not in any case...

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a simple layman. By contrast with a purely juridical conception, Balsamon sketches, not without prudence, a charismatical conception of imperial power. He suggests that [the emperor’s right of] ‘promoting’ the patriarch is not only the [right of] choosing from a list of three names which is in principle submitted by the assembly of metropolitans, or of imposing his choice on the same assembly in the case of disagreement, as is envisaged in a chapter of the Book of Ceremonies: it is above all [the right of] ‘creating’ him – before the religious consecration in which the metropolitans proceed to Hagia Sophia on the following Sunday –, either by invoking the Holy Spirit, as Balsamon says, or by using the somewhat more neutral formula preserved by the ceremonial of the 10th century: ‘Grace Divine and the Royalty that we have received from it promote the very pious person before us to the rank of patriarch of Constantinople.’ The ‘designation’ of the patriarch would be a political prerogative, just as the carving out of dioceses and the promotion of Episcopal sees, to which the emperor has the sovereign right to proceed for a better harmony between the spiritual and the temporal powers; but his ‘promotion by invocation of the Spirit’ is a religious, if not a liturgical act, which only a charisma can justify…”

Balsamon went so far as to reverse the traditional Patriarch-soul, Emperor-body metaphor in favour of the emperor: “Emperors and Patriarchs must be respected as teachers of the Church for the sake of their dignity, which they received through anointing with chrism. Hence derives the power of the right-believing Emperors to instruct the Christian peoples and, like priests, offer incense to God. Their glory consists in the fact that, like the sun, they enlighten the world from one end to the other with the flash of their Orthodoxy. The strength and activity of the Emperor touches the soul and body of man while the strength and power of the Patriarch touches only the soul…”

Again, Balsamon wrote: “The emperor is subject neither to the laws nor to the Church canons.” And yet St. Nicholas the Mystic, Patriarch of Constantinople in the tenth century, had written: “If the emperor is the enemy and foe of the laws, who will fear them?... An emperor who gives orders to slander, to murder through treachery, to celebrate unlawful marriages, and to seize other people’s property, is not an emperor, but a brigand, a slanderer, and adulterer and a thief”.

And so the Balsamonite teaching on the role of the Emperor was an innovation that could only lead to the undermining of the Empire and its eventual fall.

15 Dagron, op. cit., p. 271.
16 Balsamon, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 120.
17 Balsamon, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 120.
And this is what in fact happened; for the dynastic history of the late twelfth century was bloody and chaotic even by Byzantine standards, as emperors disposed of each other, and the people lost all respect for an emperor once he had been overthrown. Thus when Andronicus I Comnenus, was overthrown, tortured and killed by Isaac II Angelus, the people, as Nicetas Choniates relates, “did not think that this was a man who had not long ago been the Emperor adorned with a royal diadem, and that they had all glorified him as a saviour, and greeted him with best wishes and bows, and they had given a terrible oath to be faithful and devoted to him”.

Isaac Angelus deposed several patriarchs, one after another... And he said: “The Emperors are allowed to do everything, because on earth there is no difference in power between God and the Emperor: the Emperors are allowed to do everything, and they can use God’s things on a par with their own, since they received the royal dignity itself from God, and there is no difference between God and them.” Moreover, he ascribed to himself the power to correct what was done in the Church contrary to the Church canons. Moreover, the encomiasts addressed Isaac as “God-like” (θεοεικέλε, θεοειδεi) and “equal to God” (σοθεξ). When the Emperors exalted their dignity to the level of Divinity in the image of the pagan tyrants, and the people trampled on them in spite of the Lord’s command: “Touch not Mine anointed”, everything began to fall apart: both the Bulgarians and Wallachians under Peter and Asen and the Serbs under Stephan Nemanya rebelled, and then the crusaders took advantage of the chaos to seize the City in 1204... As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: “No more than 15,000 Latin crusaders stormed the well fortified city with its population of one million and its five-times larger garrison! After this the same band of wandering knights took possession of the whole of Balkan Greece and founded their Latin empire on its ruins. Nobody thought of resisting, of saving the capital, of defending the Orthodox monarchy. The local Byzantine administration itself offered its services to the new masters. In the lower classes apathy reigned towards all that had happened, and even evil joy at the wealthy city’s sacking. Using the suitable opportunity, local separatists sprang into life: not only Serbia, Bosnia and Bulgaria separated and declared their independence, but also the purely Greek provinces of Epirus, Trebizond and some of the islands...”

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19 Nicetas Choniates, The Reign of Isaac, III, 7; quoted in Lebedev, op. cit., p. 95.
20 Nicetas Choniates, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 109.
21 Isaac, Novella de electionibus pontificum (Law on the Election of Bishops), P.G. 135: 440; in Lebedev, op. cit., p. 95.
J.B. Bury, following Mommsen, called the government of Byzantium “an autocracy tempered by the legal right of revolution”. But during the Macedonian dynasty, the idea of lawful succession from father to son had taken root. So the anarchy at the end of the twelfth century was a regression – but a regression made worse by the fact that there now existed a “canonical” argument for the absolutism of the emperors, and that many Byzantium now treated the emperor with an adulation that was nothing less than idolatrous.

Thus twelve years after the fall of the City, Nicetas Choniates wrote: “For most of the Roman Emperors it was quite intolerable merely to give orders, to walk around in gold clothes, to use the public purse as their own, to distribute it however and to whomever they wanted, and to treat free people as if they were slaves. They considered it an extreme insult to themselves if they were not recognised to be wise men, like gods to look at, heroes in strength, wise in God like Solomon, God-inspired leaders, the most faithful rule of rules – in a word, infallible judges of both Divine and human matters. Therefore instead of rebuking, as was fitting, the irrational and bold, who were introducing teachings new and unknown to the Church, or even presenting the matter to those who by their calling should know and preach about God, they, not wishing to occupy the second place, themselves became at one and the same time both proclaimers of the dogmas and their judges and establishers, and they often punished those who did not agree with them”...

The Nicaean Empire and the Sacrament of Royal Anointing

After the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders in 1204, asks Hieromonk (now Bishop) Dionyiu s, “what remained for the few Byzantine patriots and zealots of Orthodoxy to do? Correctly evaluating the situation, they understood that the process of the fall was already irreversible, that neither the empire nor the capital could be saved by them. Having elected Theodore Lascaris as emperor on the day before the fall of Constantinople, they left the capital with him and founded a centre of resistance in the hilly and wooded district of Bithynia. It is noteworthy that the centre became the city of Nicaea, the place in which the First and Seventh (the last) Ecumenical Councils had been conducted. Here, to Nicaea, there flowed the church hierarchs who had not submitted to the Roman pope and his puppet – the new patriarch of Constantinople. These zealot bishops elected their own Orthodox Nicaean patriarch. The Niceaen patriarch received St. Savva of Serbia and gave autocephaly to the Serbian Church; and it was he who appointed our Metropolitan Cyril, the fellow-struggler of the right-believing Prince Alexander Nevsky. In this way the Nicaean Greeks had communion with the Orthodox in other countries.

“The material and military forces of the Nicaean Empire were tiny by comparison with its mighty enemies: the Latin West and the Muslim East. And in spite of that the Nicaean Kingdom survived for more than half a century. The Providence of God clearly preserved it, destroying its dangerous enemies in turn: the Turks constricted the Latins, and these same Turks were themselves defeated by the Mongols.

“The Nicaean Empire relit in the Greeks the flame of zeal for Orthodoxy and its national-state vestment. It opposed faith and life according to the faith to the society that had been corrupted by base materialist instincts. The first three Nicaean emperors Theodore I Lascaris, John Vatatzes and Theodore II were people of burning faith, firm and energetic rulers and courageous warriors.

“Interesting is the reply of the second Nicaean Emperor John Vatatzes to Pope Innocent III. Rejecting the pope’s offer of a unia, and replying to his mockery (what kind of emperor are you, he said, if you sit in the woods and not in the capital), John replied: ‘The emperor is he who rules not walls and towers, not stones and logs, but the people of the faithful.’ And this people was those who for the sake of the preservation of Orthodoxy abandoned the capital and gathered with him ‘in the woods’.”

So Romanity survived. In Nicaea the Lascarid Emperors preserved and nurtured the strength of the Roman power in exile...

What had changed to turn the wrath of the Lord to mercy? Leaving aside the basic and most essential condition for any real turn for the better - the repentance of the people, - we may point to the fact that the Lascarid Emperors treated the Patriarchs with much more respect than the Comneni and Angeli had done - symphony was restored. And this improvement was reinforced by an institutional or sacramental development that strengthened the autocracy while at the same time restoring the Patriarch to a position of something like equality with the Emperor. This was the introduction, at the coronation of Emperor Theodore I Lascaris, of the sacrament of imperial anointing - visible anointing with holy oil, at the hands of a patriarch - into the imperial inauguration rite...

It had taken several centuries for the enthronement of the emperor to acquire this strictly ecclesiastical character. Alexander Dvorkin writes: “The ceremony of coronation introduced by Diocletian was accomplished by the first official of the Empire. The first Christian emperors continued this practice. For example, Theodosius II was crowned by the prefect of the city of Constantinople. However, at the coronation of his successor, Marcian, the patriarch was already present. [And his successor, Leo, was probably

crowned by the patriarch.] On the one hand, this signified that the patriarch had become the second most important official person in the Empire after the emperor himself. But on the other hand, his participation turned the coronation into a religious ceremony. In the course of it the emperor was subjected to a kind of ordination, he received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. From that time the imperial palace became known as the holy palace. The palace ceremonies acquired a liturgical character in which the emperor played a double role: as representative of God on earth and representative of the people before God, the symbol of God Himself and of the Divine incarnation. Nevertheless, during the whole of the first half of Byzantine history the crowning only sanctioned de facto the already proclaimed emperor. The ancient Roman tradition of the army and senate proclaiming the emperor continued to remain the main criterion of their [his?] entering into his post. However, in the eleventh century there appeared the opinion among the canonists (such as Patriarch Arsenius the Studite) that the lawfulness of the emperors was founded, not on the proclamation, but upon the patriarchal crowning.

“A special character was given to the position of the emperor by specific petitions in the litanies and prayers read in the churches on feastdays. In the prayer on Christmas Eve Christ was asked to ‘raise the peoples of the whole inhabited world to give tribute to Your Majesty as the magi brought gifts to Christ’. In the songs of Pentecost it was said that the Holy Spirit descended in the form of fiery tongues on the head of the emperor. Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote that it was precisely through the palace ceremonies that ‘imperial power is directed in the needful rhythm and order, and the Empire can in this way represent the harmony and movement of the Universe that comes from the Creator’. The Byzantines believed fervently precisely in such an understanding of the role of the emperor. However, this did not prevent them from taking part in the overthrow of an emperor whom they considered unworthy or dishonourable. His holiness did not guarantee him from suffering a violent death. The Byzantines venerated the symbol, which by no means necessarily coincided with every concrete personality. That emperor whose personality in the eyes of the people and the Church did not correspond to his lofty calling was considered a tyrant and usurper, and his violent overthrow was only a matter of time and was seen as a God-pleasing act…

“The emperor was crowned by the patriarch, and in later Byzantium the opinion prevailed that it was precisely this act of crowning that led him into the imperial dignity. The patriarch received his confession of faith and could refuse to crown him if he did not agree to change his faith or correct his morals. As a last resort the patriarch could excommunicate the emperor…”

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27 Dvorkin, Ocheki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, pp. 695-696, 697-698 (in Russian). The
The very late appearance of the fully-fledged rite, including anointing requires some explanation…

Dagron considers that the Theodore Lascaris’ anointing by the patriarch in Nicaea in 1208 was modelled on the westerners’ anointing of Baudouin I in Constantinople in 1204.\textsuperscript{28} It both bolstered imperial power and strengthened the position of the Church in relation to imperial power: “Far from the historical capital, in the modest surroundings of Nicaea, it would have appeared necessary to materialise the ‘mystery of royalty’. The Church, being from now on the only force capable of checking the secessionist tendencies, was able to seize the opportunity to place her mark more deeply on the imperial coronation. Using the request of clergy from Constantinople who wanted the convocation of a council to nominate a patriarch, Theodore Laskaris, who was not yet officially emperor, fixed a date that would allow the new titular incumbent to proceed to the ‘habitual’ date, that is, during Holy Week [Holy Thursday, to be more precise], for the making of holy chrism (το θειον του μυρου χρυσμα). On his side, [Patriarch] Michael Autoreianos, who had just been elected on March 20, 1208, multiplied initiatives aimed at strengthening imperial authority, exhorting the army in a circular letter in which we are astonished to find echoes of the idea of the holy war, remitting the sins of the soldiers and of the emperor, and taking an oath of dynastic fidelity from the bishops assembled in Nicaea.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} Dvorkin agrees with him (op. cit., p. 698). So, in a more guarded way, does Vera Zemskova (personal communication, August 11, 2000), who writes that “the rite of anointing arose in Byzantium under the influence of the West, where the sacrament already existed and had its source in the understanding of the sacredness of power that was characteristic for the Barbarians. True, it is impossible to say precisely what kind of influence this was. Even in the history of the intensive contacts between the Emperor Manuel Comnenus (1143-1180) and the western sovereigns there is no mention of this subject. The rite appeared after the conquest of Constantinople with the emperors of the Nicaean empire…”

\textsuperscript{29} There is in fact little agreement about the date at which this sacrament was introduced in Byzantium. According to Fomin and Fomina, (op. cit., vol. I, p. 96), it was introduced in the ninth century, when Basil I was anointed with the chrismation oil or with olive oil (P.G. 102.765); according to M.V. Zyzykin (Patriarkh Nikon (Patriarch Nicon), Warsaw, 1931, part I, p. 133) - in the 10th century, when Nicephorus was anointed by Patriarch Polyeuctus; according to Canning (op. cit., p. 15) - in the 12th century; according to Dagron (op. cit., p. 282) - in the 13th century. Nicetas Khoniates mentions that Alexis III was “anointed” at his coronation in 1195; but according to Vera Zemskova (personal communication) it is likely that this meant “raising to the rank of emperor” rather than anointing with chrism in the literal, bodily sense. In this distinction between visible and invisible anointing lies the crux of the matter, for even bishops, who (in the East) received no visible anointing, were often described as having been anointed. And when St. Photius said of the Emperor Michael III that God “has created him and anointed him since the cradle as the emperor of His People”, he was clearly speaking about an invisible anointing.

\textsuperscript{29} Dagron, op. cit., pp. 282-283.
Royal anointing exalted the authority of the emperor by closely associating him with the Church. For the rite had similarities to the rite of ordination of clergy and was administered by the Patriarch. As the Byzantine writer Zosimas wrote: “Such was the link between the Imperial dignity and the First-Hierarchical dignity that the former not only could not even exist without the latter. Subjects were much bolder in deciding on conspiracies against one whom they did not see as having been consecrated by native religion”.  

Perhaps also the Byzantines introduced anointing at this point in reaction to its downgrading by Pope Gregory VII and his successors, in order to bolster the prestige of the anointed kings in the face of the anti-monarchism of the Popes, who constituted one of the greatest political powers in the world at that time and the greatest threat to the survival of the Byzantine Church and Empire. Against the claims of the Popes to possess all the charismas, including the charisma of political government, the Byzantines put forward the anointing of their Emperors. It was as if they said: a truly anointed and right-believing Emperor outweighs an uncanonically ordained and false-believing Patriarch...

The lateness of the introduction of imperial anointing in Byzantium is paralleled by a similar slowness in the development of the rite of crowning in marriage. Both marriage and coronation are “natural” sacraments that existed in some form before the coming of Christianity; so that they needed not so much replacing as supplementing, purifying and raising to a new, consciously Christian level. This being so, the Church wisely did not hasten to create completely new rites for them, but only eliminated the more grossly pagan elements, added a blessing and then communed the newly-weds or the newly-crowned in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Since kingmaking, like marriage, was a “natural” sacrament that predated the New Testament Church, the ecclesiastical rite was not felt to be constitutive of legitimate kingship in Byzantium - at any rate, until the introduction of the last element of the rite, anointing, probably in the 12th or 13th century. After all, the pagan emperors had been recognized by Christ and the apostles although they came to power independently of the Church. The Roman Empire was believed to have been created by God alone, independently of the Church. As the Emperor Justinian’s famous Sixth Novella puts it: "Both proceed from one source", God, which is why the Empire did not need to be re-instituted by the Church. Of course, the fact that the Empire, like the Church, was of Divine origin did not mean that the two institutions were of equal dignity. Whereas the Church was “the fullness of Him Who filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1.23), and as such eternal, the Empire, as all believing Byzantines knew and accepted, was destined to be destroyed by the Antichrist. The Church was like the soul which survives the death of the body, being by nature superior to it.

30 Zosimas, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 118.
Having said that, the fact that the Empire, like the body, was created by God was of great importance as against those who asserted, like Pope Gregory VII, that its origin lay in the fallen passions of man and the devil. It was against this political Manichaeism that the institution of imperial anointing in Byzantium stood as a powerful witness. Or, to use a different metaphor: the quasi-Chalcedonian “dogma” of the union without confusion of the two institutions in Byzantium, the one institution anointing and the other being anointed, served to mark if off from the political Monophysitism of the Popes, for whom the Divinity of the Church “swallowed up”, as it were, the “mere humanity” of the Empire.

Another reason for the introduction of imperial anointing in Byzantium may have been a perceived need to protect the monarchy against potential usurpers from within, to bolster the legitimacy of the lawful Emperors against those innumerable coups which, as we have seen, so disfigured the image of Byzantine life in the decades before 1204. As we have seen, the earlier introduction of anointing in Spain, Francia and England had had just such a beneficial effect. And certainly, the need for some higher criterion of legitimacy had never been more sorely needed than in the period of the Nicaean empire, when Roman power appeared to be divided among a number of mini-states.

In previous centuries, the de facto criterion of legitimacy had been: the true emperor is he who sits on the throne in Constantinople, whatever the means he used to obtain the throne. This may have seemed close to the law of the jungle, but it at any rate had the advantage of clarity. The problem after 1204, however, was that he who sat on the throne in Constantinople was a Latin heretic who had obtained his throne, not just by killing a few personal enemies, but by mass slaughter of the ordinary people and the defiling of all that was most holy to the Byzantines, including the very sanctuary of Hagia Sophia. The patriarch had not recognised him and had died in exile. There was no question for the majority of Byzantines: this was not the true emperor. So the true emperor had to be found in one of the Greek kingdoms that survived the fall of the City: Nicaea, Trebizond and Epirus. But which? For a time, from the year 1222, it looked as if the Epirote ruler Theodore Angelus, whose dominion extended from the Adriatic to the Aegean and who was related to the great families of the Angeli, Comneni and Ducae, had a greater claim to the throne than the Nicene John Vatatzes, who was the son-in-law of the first Nicaean emperor, Theodore Lascaris. However, Theodore Angelus’s weakness was that the Patriarch lived in Nicaea, while the metropolitan of Thessalonica refused to crown him, considering that a violation of the rights of the Patriarch. So he turned instead to Archbishop Demetrius (Chomatianos) of Ochrid and Bulgaria, who crowned him in Thessalonica in 1225 or 1227. According to Vasiliev, “he crowned and anointed Theodore who
‘put on the purple robe and began to wear the red shoes’, distinctive marks of the Byzantine basileus. One of the letters of Demetrius shows that his coronation and anointment of Theodore of Epirus was performed ‘with the general consent of the members of the senate, who were in the west (that is, on the territory of Thessalonica and Epirus), of the clergy, and of all the large army.’ Another document testifies that the coronation and anointment were performed with the consent of all the bishops who lived ‘in that western part’. Finally, Theodore himself signed his edicts (chrysobulls) with the full title of the Byzantine Emperor: ‘Theodore in Christ God Basileus and Autocrat of the Romans.”

Moreover, from the letters of Metropolitan John Apocaucus of Naupactus, as V.G. Vasilievsky writes, “we learn for the first time what an active part was taken by the Greek clergy and especially by the Greek bishops. The proclamation of Theodore Angelus as the Emperor of the Romans was taken very seriously: Thessalonica, which had passed over into his hands, was contrasted with Nicaea; Constantinople was openly indicated to him as the nearest goal of his ambition and as an assured gain; in speech, thought, and writing, it was the common opinion that he was destined to enter St. Sophia and occupy there the place of the Orthodox Roman emperors where the Latin newcomers were sitting illegally. The realization of such dreams did not lie beyond the limits of possibility; it would be even easier to take Constantinople from Thessalonica than from Nicaea.”

However, Theodore Angelus’ position had one weakness that proved fatal to his hopes: he was not anointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Previous Byzantine emperors, including Constantine himself, had received the throne through the acclamation of the army and/or the people, which was considered sufficient for legitimacy. But now, in the thirteenth century, acclamation alone was not enough: imperial anointing by the first-hierarch of the Church was considered necessary.

But here it was the Lascarids of Nicaea had the advantage over both the Angeli of Thessalonica and the Comneni of Trebizond. For the first Lascarid, Theodore I, had been anointed earlier (in 1208) and by a hierarch whom everybody recognised as having a greater authority – Patriarch Michael IV Autoreianus. As Michael’s successor, Germanus II, wrote to Archbishop Demetrius: “Tell me, most sacred man, which fathers bestowed on you the lot of crowning to the kingdom? By which of the archbishops of Bulgaria was any emperor of the Romans ever crowned? When did the archpastor of Ochrid stretch out his right hand in the capacity of patriarch and consecrate a royal head? Indicate to us a father of the Church, and it is enough. Suffer reproach, for you are wise, and love even while being beaten. Do not get angry. For truly the royal anointing introduced by you is not for us the oil of

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joy, but an unsuitable oil from a wild olive. Whence did you buy this precious chrism (which, as is well known, is boiled in the patriarchate), since your previous stores have been devoured by time?"  

In reply, Archbishop Demetrius pointed to the necessity of having an emperor in the West in order effectively to drive out the Latins. Theodore Angelus had carried out his task with great distinction, and was himself of royal blood. Besides, “the Greek West has followed the example of the East: after all, in despite of ancient Constantinopolitan practice, an emperor has been proclaimed and a patriarch chosen in the Bithynian diocese as need has dictated. And when has it ever been heard that one and the same hierarch should rule in Nicaea and call himself patriarch of Constantinople? And this did not take place at the decree of the whole senate and all the hierarchs, since after the capture of the capital both the senate and the hierarchs fled both to the East and the West. And I think that the greater part are in the West…  

“For some unknown reason you have ascribed to yourself alone the consecration of chrism. But it is one of the sacraments performed by all the hierarchs (according to Dionysius the Areopagite). If you allow every priest to baptise, then why is anointing to the kingdom, which is secondary by comparison with baptism, condemned by you? But according to the needs of the time it is performed directly by the hierarch next in rank after the patriarch, according to the unfailing customs and teaching of piety. However, he who is called to the kingdom is usually anointed, not with chrism, but with oil sanctified by prayer… We had no need of prepared chrism, but we have the sepulchre of the Great Martyr Demetrius, from which chrism pours out in streams…”  

Nevertheless, it was the feeling that the true anointing must be performed by a patriarch that proved crucial. In the end it was the advantage of having received the true anointing from the true first-hierarch of the Church that gave the victory to the Lascarids. And so this sacrament, which, as we have seen, was so critical in strengthening the Western Orthodox kingdoms at a time when invasions threatened from without and chaos from within, came to serve the same purpose in Eastern Orthodoxy… In any case, the power of the Angeli was crushed by the Bulgarian Tsar John Asen. Then, in 1242, the Nicaean Emperor John III Vatatzes forced Theodore Angelus’ son John to renounce the imperial title in favour of the inferior term “despot”. And four years later the Emperor John conquered Thessalonica.  

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33 Patriarch Germanus, in Uspensky, op. cit., p. 412.  
34 Archbishop Demetrius, in Uspensky, op. cit., p. 413.  
35 As Aristides Papadakis writes, “the continuity and prestige conferred on the Lascarid house by this solemn blessing and by the subsequent presence of a patriarch at Nicaea were decisive. For, by then, coronation by a reigning patriarch was thought to be necessary for imperial legitimacy.” (The Orthodox East and the Rise of the Papacy, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994, p. 212)  
Thus it was the earlier and more authoritative anointing of the Nicaean Emperors that won them the dynastic struggle... Under their rule the Nicaean Empire prospered. They were also less luxurious than their predecessors. As Macrides writes: “Their style of rule was partly a response to limited resources, partly to exclusion from Constantinople, the natural setting, and also a reaction to the ‘sins’ which had caused God to withdraw his support from the Byzantines. John III Vatatzes and his son Theodore II ruled as if New Constantines had never existed. To rephrase Choniates’ words of criticism for the twelfth-century emperors: John III and Theodore II did not wear gold, did not treat common property as their own nor free men as slaves, nor did they hear themselves celebrated as being wiser than Solomon, heroic in strength, God-like in looks. Contrary to the behaviour of most emperors, John did not even have his son proclaimed emperor in his lifetime, not because he did not love his son, nor because he wanted to leave the throne to anyone else, but because the opinion and choice of his subjects was not evident. John was an emperor who reproved his son for wearing the symbols of imperial power, for wearing gold while hunting, because he said the imperial insignia represent the blood of the emperor’s subjects and should be worn only for the purpose of impressing foreign ambassadors with the people’s wealth. John’s care to separate public wealth from his own became legendary. He set aside land to produce enough for the imperial table and had a crown made for the empress from the sale of eggs produced by his hens. He called it the ‘egg crown’ (ο&omicron;το&omicron;ν). John was an emperor who submitted to the criticism of the church. When his mistress was forbidden entrance to the church by the... monk Blemmydes, tutor to his son, she went to him in a fury and charged him to come to her defence. But he only replied remorsefully that he could not punish a just man. It was precisely the qualities which made him an exceptional emperor which also contributed to his recognition as a saint by the local population in Magnesia...”

From Michael Palaeologus to Gregory Palamas

In 1261, the first emperor of a new dynasty, Michael Palaeologus, reconquered Constantinople from the Latins. However, on ascending the throne, he changed course in a caesaropapist direction... Moreover, he was closer to the luxuriousness of the caesaropapist Angeli rather than the modesty of the more Orthodox Lascari: “Palaeologus openly set out on the old path of the Comneni and Angeli. Not only was the capital returned, but the old order, the demands and expenses of the antiquated world order that had lived out its time, was also re-established...”

37 Macrides, op. cit., pp. 280-281. The emperor’s body was found to be incorrupt and fragrant seven years after his death. See The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, vol. 11 (November), Athens, 1979, pp. 154-156; translated in Orthodox Life, vol. 32, № 6, November-December, 1982, p. 44.
38 Uspensky, op. cit., p. 494.
In fact, as Sir Steven Runciman writes, he was “a usurper who had made himself in turn Grand Duke and regent for the child Emperor John IV, then co-Emperor and finally senior Emperor. The Patriarch Arsenius had grudgingly condoned each step, only when Michael swore to respect the boy-Emperor’s rights. He was so suspicious of Michael’s intentions that in 1260 he abdicated; but, when his successor died a few months later, Michael persuaded him to return, again promising not to harm John IV. But his triumphant recapture of the capital convinced Michael that he was divinely protected. He pushed the boy further and further into the background, and in 1262 he deposed and blinded him. Arsenius, who had been looking on with growing horror, thereupon excommunicated Michael…”

The news about the blinding spread, and in Bithynia a rebellion broke out under a blind pretender with the name John Lascaris. The rebellion was suppressed with difficulty. Meanwhile, Michael tried through the clerics to get his excommunication removed. “But Arsenius replied: ‘I let a dove into my bosom, but it turned out to be a snake and fatally bit me.’ Once, on listening to a rejection, Palaeologus said: ‘What then, are you commanding me to renounce the empire?’ – and wanted to give him his sword. Arsenius stretched out his hand, and Palaeologus began to accuse the old man of making an attempt on the emperor’s life. In vain did the emperor embrace the knees of the patriarch: Arsenius pushed him away and went off to his cell. Then the emperor began to complain: ‘The patriarch is ordering me to abandon State affairs, not to collect taxes, and not to execute justice. That is how this spiritual doctor heals me! It is time to seek mercy from the pope’. The emperor began to seek an occasion to overthrow Arsenius, but the patriarch’s life was irreproachable. The emperor gathered several hierarchs in Thessalonica and summoned Arsenius to a trial, but he did not come. The obsequious hierarchs tried to demonstrate that the disjunction of the ‘soul of the State’ from the Church was a disease that threatened order… Palaeologus decided to get rid of Arsenius whatever the cost. Having gathered the hierarchs, he laid out to them all the steps he had taken to be reconciled with the patriarch. ‘It seems that because of my deed he wants me to abandon the throne. But to whom am I to give the kingdom? What will be the consequences for the empire? What if another person turns out to be incapable of such a great service? Who can guarantee that I will live peacefully, and what will become of my family? What people ever saw the like, and has it ever happened amongst us that a hierarch should do such things without being punished? Doesn’t he understand that for one who has tasted of the blessedness of royal power it is impossible to part with it except together with his life? Repentance is decreed by the Church, and does it not exist for emperors? If I don’t find it from you, I will turn to other Churches and receive healing from them. You decide.’”

40 Uspensky, *op. cit.*, pp. 510, 511.
Finally Arsenius was deposed for failing to appear at his trial, and the more malleable Germanus was made patriarch in his place. But Arsenius and his followers refused to be reconciled with this. In justification of his deposition of Patriarch Arsenius, the emperor invoked his right as epistemonarch – the same defence as was used by the absolutist emperors of the twelfth century. Then, writes Dagron, in a prostagma of 1270, he “invoked yet again his title of epistemonarch of the Church to force Patriarch Joseph I to give Deacon Theodore Skoutariotes, on whom he had conferred the imperial title of dikaiophylax, a rank corresponding in the hierarchy to the archontes of the Church. In order to settle this trivial affair, the emperor, completely impregnated with the spirit of the Comneni and the teachings of Balsamon, did not hesitate to affirm that the [Church’s] choices of patriarch had to be aligned with those of the emperor and that the ecclesiastical offices were nothing other than transfers of the imperial offices, as was demonstrated in the Donation of Constantine.”

Meanwhile, the Emperor was trying to achieve an ecclesiastical union with the Roman Church. His purpose was political – the reunification of the Greek lands under his authority. And for that he needed the help of the Pope against his western enemies, especially Charles of Anjou – which help could be bought only at the price of a unia. Both the people and the Church were against the idea. They were not prepared to place the nation above the faith, and began to turn against the Emperor.

Even “the emperor’s spiritual father Joseph went over to the opposition, counting on ascending the patriarchal throne. He began to advise the emperor that Germanus was not able to absolve him from the curse placed on him by Arsenius, and the emperor sent Joseph to Germanus to persuade him to leave voluntarily. When Germanus was convinced that this advice came from the emperor, he departed for the Mangana monastery…”

“Joseph achieved his aim and occupied the patriarchal throne for seven years (1267-74)... The removal of the curses from the emperor – his first task – was carried out with exceptional triumphalism. In the presence of the Synod and the court the emperor crawled on his knees, confessing his sin, the blinding of Lascaris. The patriarch and hierarchs one by one read out an act of absolution of the emperor from the excommunication laid upon him...”

“But the Emperor’s humiliation did not satisfy Arsenius’s adherents. The ascetic element in the Church, based mainly the monasteries, always suspicious of the court and the upper hierarchy, believing them to be sinfully luxurious and over-interested in secular learning, saw in Arsenius a saintly martyr who had dared to oppose the Emperor on a basic moral issue; and
their party was joined by many even in the hierarchy who maintained the old Studite tradition that opposed Imperial control of the Church. The Arsenites, as they began to be called, would not accept Joseph’s compromise. They continued to regard the Emperor as excommunicate, his hierarchy as illegitimate and his officials as the servants of a usurper. They were never very numerous; but their monkish connections gave them influence over the people. The hierarchy tired to rid the monasteries of such dissidents, but only drove them underground. Dismissed monks, poorly clad, and often called the saccophoroi, the wearers of sackcloth, would go about the people preaching resistance…”43

The Arsenites remained in schism from the official Church for several more decades. They insisted that “all elections to the see of Constantinople after the patriarch’s deposition (1265) were uncanonical and invalid. No less irregular in their opinion was the status of those elevated to the episcopal dignity by Arsenius’ ‘illegitimate’ successors.”44 In 1310 most of them were reconciled to the official Church. Some, however, such as St. Theoliptus, metropolitan of Philadelphia, considered that the Church had been reconciled too easily with the Arsenites and broke communion with the official Church for a period.45

Restored to communion with the Church, and with the anti-uniate Arsenites excommunicated, the Emperor now had greater freedom in planning the unia. However, the reaction of the Church against the unia was growing stronger. Patriarch Joseph was now determined to limit the Emperor’s use of the ‘epistemonarchy’ “to the most modest temporal dimensions. Job Iasites, in the name of Patriarch Joseph, restated the issue a little after 1273: ‘It is true that he who wears the crown has received in person the responsibility and the title of epistemonarch of the holy Churches. However, that does not consist in electing, or deposing, or excommunicating, or carrying out any other action or function of the bishop, but, in accordance with the meaning of the term ‘epistemonarch’, it consists [for the emperor] in wisely keeping the leaders of the Churches in order and rank, and in giving the force of law to the canonical decrees which they issue. If these decrees are truly canonical, it is not in his power, as epistemonarch, to oppose them…”46

The unia was signed at Lyons in 1274 by a delegation led by the ex-Patriarch Germanus. The emperor conceded all the dogmatic points (the Filioque, unleavened bread, the pope’s supreme authority) without argument and promised to help the pope in his next crusade. In exchange the pope promised to stop his enemies, especially Charles of Anjou, from invading the

43 Runciman, op. cit., p. 69.
44 Papadakis, op. cit., p. 219.
46 Dagron, op. cit., p. 263.
Greek lands. However, the compromise proved to be unnecessary. In 1282 a successful rebellion by the Sicilians against Charles (without the help of the new pope, who backed Charles) removed the threat of invasion.

Many of the opponents of the unia were now imprisoned. One of these was the future patriarch John Beccus, who was released after being persuaded of the rightness of the uniate cause by the emperor. But the Church as a whole offered strong resistance.

“Two parties were formed,” writes Fr. Ambroise Frontier: “the Politicals or Opportunists, who strangely resemble the Ecumenists of today, and the Zealots, who were especially strong in Thessaloniki. The center of Orthodoxy, however, was Mount Athos. The persecutions of Michael VIII and of Beccus, his Patriarch, equalled those of the first centuries of Christianity. The intruder Patriarch went himself to the Holy Mountain to impose the decree of Lyons but he failed miserably. Only a few poor weak-minded monks followed him. In the *Menaiion* of September 22, we read the following rubric: ‘Memory of the Holy Martyrs of the Monastery of Zographou, who chastized the Emperor Michael Palaeologus, the latinizer and his Patriarch Beccus, and died, through burning in the tower of their monastery.’ Yes, 26 monks died, burned in the tower of their monastery, others were drowned in the sea in front of Vatopedi and Iviron. At Karyes, the capital of Mount Athos, both laity and monks were beheaded. These Martyrs assured the victory of Orthodoxy by their sacrifice and with their blood washed away the shame of the treason of Lyons.

“To please the new Pope, Nicholas III, the servile Emperor ordered Isaac of Ephesus to accompany the papal legates through the prisons of Constantinople to show him the imprisoned Orthodox. Some had been tortured, others had their hands and feet cut off, others their eyes punctured and others their tongues ripped out. It is a fact: Christ is not discussed, He is confessed…”

An anti-uniate council was in Thessaly, which anathematized the pope, the emperor and his uniate patriarch, John Beccus. The Fathers of Holy Mount Athos joined in the condemnation, writing to the emperor: “It is written in the explanation of the Divine Liturgy that the liturgizer commemorates the name

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47 “The Zealots preached asceticism and contemplation and disliked the Imperial court and the intellectuals, lay and clerical, who frequented it. Their opponents, known as the Politicals, believed in co-operation with the State and the use, if need be, of Economy” (Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 70). (V.M.)

48 Frontier, “The Council of Lyons and the False Union of 1274”, *The True Vine*, vol. 2, № 4, Winter, 1975. Outside Athos, the resistance to the unia was led by the holy King Milutin of Serbia, whose body remains incorrupt and wonderworking to this day. In Constantinople, the unia was denounced by the great ascetic, St. Meletius of Mount Gelesion. The emperor ordered his tongue to be cut out, but by a miracle the saint continued to speak clearly and distinctly (see his *Life* in *Living Orthodoxy*, vol. XII, № 4, July-August, 1990, p. 15).
of his hierarch, showing his exceeding obedience to him, and that he is in communion with him both in faith and as a steward of the Divine Mysteries... [But] he who receives a heretic is subject to the curses laid on him, and he who gives communion to an excommunicate is himself excommunicate.”

“On December 11, 1282, Michael died, hated by his people. His wife, Empress Theodora and his son and successor Andronicus II Palaeologus refused to give him burial and Church honors. Andronicus II officially denounced the union and restored Orthodoxy. He sent edicts to all parts of the Empire proclaiming an amnesty for all those who had been exiled or imprisoned because of their zeal for the Church.

“Ten years after the council of Lyons, in 1285, an Orthodox Council was held in the Church of Blachernae in Constantinople. Gregory of Cyprus was the Orthodox Patriarch and Andronicus II the Emperor. The false union of Lyons was rejected and the heresy of the Filioque was condemned. Later on, Gennadius Scholarius, Patriarch of Constantinople, after the fall of the Empire in the XVth century, declared this Council to be Ecumenical. To those who considered it local because of the absence of the heretics and schismatics, Gennadius answered that: ‘... the absence of heretics does not diminish in any way the character of Ecumenicity.’”

So, after one apostate reign, Byzantium returned to the symphony of powers...

In the 1330s another, more original attempt to attain the unia with Rome was made: the Italian Greek monk Barlaam was sent by the emperor to Avignon, where he argued for the unia on the basis of agnosticism: the truths of the Faith cannot be proved, he said, so we might as well take both positions, the Greek and the Latin, as private opinions! Pope Benedict was no more inclined than the Byzantine Church to accept such agnosticism, so the attempt failed. But the more important effect of Barlaam’s philosophizing, in this as in other areas of theology and asceticism, was to elicit a series of Councils between 1341 and 1351, in which the Byzantine Church, led by St. Gregory Palamas, the future Archbishop of Thessalonica, was able to define her teaching in relation to the new currents of thought emanating from the West. In particular, they anathematized the teaching that the grace of God is created. Apart from their dogmatic significance, these Palamite Councils presented an image that was infinitely precious: that of Orthodox bishops convened by a right-believing emperor to define essential truths of the faith and thereby preserve the heritage of Orthodoxy for future generations and other nations...

49 Monk Kallistos Vlastos, Dokimion istorikon peri tou skhismatos tis dutikis ekklesias apo tis Orthodoxou Anatolikis (Historical Treatise on the schism of the western church from the Orthodox East), Mount Athos, 1991, p. 109 (in Greek).
50 Frontier, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
The Sultan’s Turban and the Pope’s Tiara

But from now on Byzantium declined inexorably. The loss of its economic power to the Genoans was a serious blow, and an outbreak of the Black Death, which, according to one source, killed most of the inhabitants of Constantinople, further undermined the strength of the State. Still more serious, the Emperor who eventually emerged victorious from the civil wars of the middle of the century, John V Palaeologus, went to Italy and submitted to Rome in 1369.

However, writes Runciman, “he was careful not to involve the Church in his conversion. His tact was rewarded. Towards the end of his reign, probably in 1380 or soon afterwards, in circumstances that are unknown to us, he was able to make a concordat with the Patriarchate which clarified and restored much of the Imperial control over the Church. It contained nine points. The Emperor was to nominate metropolitans from three candidates whose names were submitted to him. He alone could transfer and promote bishops. He had to sanction appointments to high Church offices. He alone could redistribute sees. Neither he nor his senior officials nor members of the Senate, which was his advisory council, could be excommunicated except with his permission, ‘because the Emperor is defender of the Church and the canons’. Bishops were to come to Constantinople and to leave it whenever he ordered. Every bishop must take an oath of allegiance to him on appointment. Every bishop must put his signature to acts passed by a Synod or Council. Every bishop must implement such acts and refuse support to any cleric or candidate for ecclesiastical office who opposed Imperial policy.

“As an Emperor John V was incompetent and almost impotent. The Turks were overrunning all his territory and exacting tribute from him. [In 1396 the Byzantine armies suffered a crushing defeat at Nicopolis, and Sultan Bayezid began a siege of Constantinople. The City was saved at this time by the intervention of the Mongols under Tamerlane in the Turkish rear.] He himself in a reign of fifty years was three times driven into exile, by his father-in-law, by his son and by his grandson. Yet, as the concordat shows, he still retained prestige enough to reaffirm his theoretical control over a Church, many of whose dioceses lay far outside of his political control…”

The concordat was a shameful document, which subordinated the Church to the State in a truly caesaropapist manner. And we can see just how far the spirit of the concordat had been accepted by the Church in a clash with Great-Prince Basil I of Russia. The reason was the decision, by the Emperor and Patriarch of Constantinople in 1393, to appoint their own candidate as metropolitan in Lithuania. Great-Prince Basil I reacted by removing the name of the emperor from the diptychs and during the celebration of the Liturgy. “We have a Church,” he said, “but we do not have an emperor”.

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51 Runciman, op. cit., p. 71.
This produced a significant riposte from the Ecumenical Patriarch Anthony IV. While not demeaning his own position as Patriarch - “the Patriarch occupies the place of Christ and he sits on the throne of the Lord Himself” – he hastened to the defence of the rights of the Emperor: “The holy Emperor occupies a lofty position in the Church. He is not what other, local princes and sovereigns are. In the beginning the Emperors strengthened and confirmed piety throughout the oikoumene. The Emperors convened the Ecumenical Councils; they confirmed by their own laws the observance of that which the divine and sacred canons say about the right dogmas and the good order of the Christian life, and they struggled greatly against heresies. Finally, the Emperors, together with the Councils, defined by their own decrees the hierarchical sees and established the boundaries of the hierarchical territories and episcopal dioceses. For all this they have great honour and occupy a lofty place in the Church. And if, by God’s permission, the pagans have encircled the possessions and lands of the Emperor, nevertheless up to the present day the Emperor receives the same position from the Church, is anointed with the great chrism according to the same rite and with the same prayers, and is established as Emperor and Autocrat of the Romans, that is, of all Christians. In every place where Christians are named, the name of the Emperor is commemorated by all the Patriarchs, Metropolitans and Bishops, and this advantage is possessed by none of the other princes or local rulers. His power, by comparison with all the others, is such that even the Latins, who have no communion with our Church, do not refuse him such obedience as they showed in former times, when they were in unity with us. All the more are Orthodox Christians obliged to do this. And if the pagans have surrounded the Emperor’s land, then Christians must not despise him for this; on the contrary, let this serve for them as a lesson in humility and force them to think: if the Great Emperor, Lord and Master of the oikoumene, who is clothed with such power, has been placed in such a restricting position, what may other local rulers and little princes suffer?... And so, my son, it is not good if you say: ‘We have a Church, but we do not have an Emperor’. It is impossible for Christians to have a Church without having an Emperor. For the Empire and the Church are in close union and communion with each other, and it is impossible to separate the one from the other. Only those emperors were rejected by Christians who were heretics, who raged against the Church and introduced corrupt dogmas. But my supreme and holy Autocrat is a most Orthodox and faithful [sovereign], a fighter, defender and avenger of the Church. That is why it is impossible to be a hierarch and not commemorate his [name]. Listen to the Apostle Peter speaking in his first Catholic epistle: ‘Fear God, honour the emperor’. He did not say ‘emperors’, so that nobody should think that he had begun to mean those who are called emperors in various peoples, but ‘emperor’, pointing to the fact that there is only one Emperor in the oikoumene. And who was this [Emperor whom the apostle commands to be honoured]? At that time he was still impious and a persecutor of Christians! But since he was holy and an apostle, he looked into
the future and saw that Christians would have one Emperor, and taught that
the impious Emperor should be honoured, so that we should understand
from that how a pious and Orthodox Emperor should be honoured. For if
some other Christians have appropriated to themselves the name of emperor,
all these examples are something unnatural and contrary to the law, rather a
matter of tyranny and violence [than of law]. In actual fact, what Fathers,
what Councils and what canons have spoken about these [emperors]? But
everything both from above and below speaks about a born Emperor whose
laws and commands are fulfilled throughout the oikoumene, and whose
name, excluding all others, is the only one commemorated everywhere by
Christians.”

This is a remarkable statement that shows how far the conception of the
emperor has changed from the one who rules by might, if not always by right,
to the one who rules by right, even if he has no might. His right, according to
the patriarch, derives exclusively from his Orthodox faith and his unique
anointing. This makes him the one and only true king on earth, and the one
whom all Christians must acknowledge. All other kings, however outwardly
powerful they may be, must concede his superiority in honour and grace.
Indeed, so inseparable is the grace of the emperor from the grace of the
Church as a whole that “it is impossible for Christians to have a Church, but
not have an Emperor”.

It seems that the Great-Prince accepted this lesson in political theology, and
there were no further attempts to question the emperor’s unique position in
the Orthodox world. This was remarkable considering that the Great Prince
was in fact a much more powerful ruler than the Emperor… However,
Patriarch Anthony did not expatiate on what would follow if the empire were
to fall – an obvious possibility in view of the Turks’ encirclement of
Constantinople. If it was truly “impossible for Christians to have a Church,
but not have an Emperor”, then, in the event of the fall of New Rome, there
were only two possible scenarios: either the reign of the Antichrist had
arrived, or the empire was to be transferred to another people and state…
Moreover, if the empire itself did not fall, but the emperor became a heretic,
was not the Russian Grand-Prince then bound to reject his authority?

“The Patriarch’s loyalty,” writes Runciman, “was greater than his realism.
But the Emperor still had some power. About twenty years later, in 1414 or
1415, Manuel II, who was generally liked by his ecclesiastics, when in
Thessalonica appointed a Macedonian bishop to the see of Moldavia and sent
him to Constantinople for consecration by the Patriarch, Euthymius II.
Euthymius refused to perform the service, on the out-of-date ground that a
bishop could not be transferred. The case undoubtedly had deeper
implications, of which we can only guess. It must be remembered the
Emperor was actually nominating a bishop for a Christian country over

52 Patriarch Anthony, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 188.
which he had no control; and the Patriarch must have feared that his own good relations with the sovereign Prince of Moldavia might be endangered. He insisted that the transference be approved by the Holy Synod. But the Emperor referred him to the concordat. He had to yield…”\textsuperscript{53}

This submission of the patriarch to the emperor was reflected in liturgical practice, as the fifteenth-century archbishop of Thessalonic, St. Simeon, bitterly admitted: “Now… the Bishop is not counted worthy of any kind of honour for the sake of Christ, but rather his lot is dishonour; he is counted immeasurably inferior to the emperor, who receives a blessing from the Hierarch. At the present time the Bishop falls down at the feet of the emperor and kisses his right hand. With the sanctified lips with which he recently touched the Sacred Sacrifice, he servilely kisses a secular hand, whose function is to hold the sword. And, O shame!, the Bishop stands while the emperor sits. For the Bishop, as the delegate of the Church, all this reflects in an indecent and shameful manner on Christ Himself. These absurd customs were introduced, however, not by the emperors themselves, but by flatterers, who in an undiscerning manner suggested to them that they should use the Divine for evil, that they should ascribe to themselves power and install and remove the Bishop. Alas, what madness! If the deposition of a Bishop is necessary, this should be done through the Holy Spirit, by Whom the Bishop has been consecrated, and not through the secular power. Hence come all our woes and misfortunes; hence we have become an object of mockery for all peoples. If we give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s, then the blessing of God will rest on everything: the Church will receive peace, and the State will become more prosperous.”\textsuperscript{54}

In spite of the acceptance of the concordat by the hierarchy, the old Zealot tradition was not dead, and there were still many in Byzantium who rejected the subordination of the Church to the State, preferring the dominion of the infidel Turks to that of the heretical Latins. For in religious matters the Turks were more tolerant than the Latins. Moreover, submission to the Turks would at least have the advantage of making the administration of the Church easier – in the present situation, the bishops under Turkish rule were separated from their head in Constantinople and were distrusted because that head lived in a different state…

Igumen Gregory Lourié writes: “It was precisely in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, when immemorial Greek territories passed over to the Turks, and some others – to the Latins, that there was formed in Byzantine society those two positions whose struggle would clearly appear in the following, 15\textsuperscript{th} century. It was precisely in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century that the holy Fathers established a preference for the Turks over the Latins, while with the humanists it was the reverse. Neither in the 15\textsuperscript{th}, nor in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century was there any talk of union with the

\textsuperscript{53} Runciman, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 71-72.
\textsuperscript{54} Zyzykin, \textit{op. cit.}, part I, pp. 122-123.
Turks – their invasion was thought to be only an evil. But already in the 14th century it became clear that the Empire would not be preserved, that they would have to choose the lesser of two evils. In the capacity of such a lesser evil, although a very great one, the holy Fathers were forced to make an irrevocable decision in favour of the Turks, under whose yoke it was possible to preserve the Church organisation and avoid the politics of forced conversions to Latinism. The danger of conversions to Islam was significantly smaller: first, because the inner administration of the Ottoman empire was based on ‘millet’, in accordance with which the civil administration of the Orthodox population was realized through the structure of the Orthodox Church and the patriarch, and this created for the Turks an interest in preserving the Church, and secondly, because the cases of conversion to Islam, however destructive they were for those who had been converted, did not threaten the purity of the confession of the Christians who remained faithful, while Latin power always strove to exert influence on the inner life and teaching of the faith of the Orthodox Church. The Church history of the 16th to 19th centuries showed that, in spite of all the oppressions inflicted on the Christians in the Ottoman empire, it protected the Christian peoples living within its frontiers from the influence of European religious ideas and Weltanschauungen, whereby it unwittingly helped the preservation of the purity of Orthodoxy…”

Of course, the victory of the Turks would be a terrible disaster. But the victory of the Latins would be an even greater disaster, since it might well signify the end of Greek Orthodoxy. Nor, said the Zealots, would buying the support of the Latins help. For, as Joseph Vryennios said early in the fifteenth century: “Let no one be deceived by delusive hopes that the Italian allied troops will sooner or later come to us. But if they do pretend to rise to defend us, they will take arms in order to destroy our city, race and name…”

The Last Act

As the political and military position of the Empire grew weaker, the pressure on both emperors and patriarchs to compromise with the faith became stronger. Negotiations with Rome dragged on, “held up partly”, as Runciman writes, “by the Pope’s difficulties with the leaders of the Conciliar movement [in the West] and partly by the uneasy situation in the East. At one

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56 St. Gregory Palamas was for a time a captive of the Turks and said of them: “This impious people [the Turks] boasts of its victory over the Romans, attributing it to their love of God. For they do not know that this world below dwells in sin, and that evil men possess the greater part of it… That is why, down to the time of Constantine, … the idolaters have almost always held power over the world.” (John Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Palamas, London: Faith Press, 1964, p. 104)
moment it seemed that a Council might take place at Constantinople; but the Turkish siege of the city in 1422 made it clear that it was no place for an international congress. Manuel II [whose advice to his son had been: not to break off negotiations with Rome, but not to commit himself to them] retired from active politics in 1423 and died two years later. His son, John VIII, was convinced that the salvation of the Empire depended upon union and tried to press for a Council; but he was unwilling at first to allow it to take place in Italy; while the Papacy still had problems to settle in the West. Delays continued. It was not until the beginning of 1438 that plans were completed and the Emperor arrived with his delegation at a Council recently opened in Ferrara and transferred to Florence in January 1439."

The leader of the bishops was Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople. He had previously told the Emperor: “The Church must go in front of the power of the Emperor, or next to it, but in no way behind it.” And yet he meekly followed the same Emperor to Florence and submitted to his instructions, which included not discussing particularly difficult and divisive issues such as the Energies of God. Moreover, he was prepared to make critical concessions on the issue of the Filioque, agreeing with the Latins that the prepositions “through” and “from” meant the same. In any case, he died before the Council had ended.

“In the end, weary of it all, longing to get home and, it was said, deliberately kept short of food and comforts, the whole Greek delegation, under orders from the Emperor and in obedience to the concordat of their Church with John V, signed the decree of union, with the exception of Mark Evgenicus [Metropolitan of Ephesus], and, its seems, of [the pagan philosopher] Plethon, who disliked the Latin Church rather more than the Greek. Mark was threatened with deposition; and, after retiring for a while to his see of Ephesus, in Turkish territory, he submitted to pressure and abdicated."

St. Mark’s motto was: “There can be no compromise in matters of the Orthodox Faith.” And again: “Let no one lord it over our faith, neither emperor, nor false council, not anyone else, but only the One God, Who Himself handed it down to us through His disciples.”

58 Runciman, op. cit., pp. 103-104.
59 Lebedev, op. cit., p. 102.
60 Runciman, op. cit., p. 109. Bishop Isaiah of Stavropol, the Bishop of Tver and Bishop Gregory of Georgia secretly left the city to avoid signing. George Scholarius, the future patriarch, together with John Evgenicos, St. Mark’s brother and the Despot Demetrius also left earlier without signing. And the signature of Methodius of Lacedaemon is nowhere to be found… (The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1990, p. 466)
61 Constantine Tsipanlis writes: “In the eyes of Mark even the complete political extinction of the Byzantine State was not as important as the preservation of the integrity of Orthodoxy” (Mark Eugenicus and the Council of Florence, New York, 1986, p. 60).
“He was treated as a martyr by almost the whole body of the Greek Church. The Emperor soon found that it was easier to sign the union than to implement it. He remained personally loyal to it, but, influenced by his aged mother, he refrained from trying to force it on his people. He found it hard to persuade anyone to take the empty Patriarchal chair. Metrophanes II, whom he appointed in May 1440, died soon afterwards. His successor, Gregory Mammas, who was a sincere advocate of union, found it prudent to retire to Italy in 1451. Bessarion [of Trebizond], liked and admired though he was personally, had already moved to Italy, shocked at the hostility that his actions had aroused at Constantinople and believing that he could best serve the Greek cause by remaining among the Italians. Isidore of Kiev’s adherence to the union was angrily repudiated by the Russian Prince, Church and people, who deprived him of his see. He too went to Italy. The Eastern Patriarchs announced that they were not bound by anything that their representatives had signed and rejected the union. George Scholarius, though he had accepted the union and was devoted to the works of Thomas Aquinas, was soon convinced by Mark Eugenicus that he had been wrong. He retired into a monastery; and on Mark’s death in 1444 he emerged as leader of the anti-unionist party. The lesser clergy and the monks followed him almost to a man.

“The Emperor John VIII died weary and disillusioned in 1448. His brother and heir Constantine XI considered himself bound by the union; but he did not try to press it on his people till the very end of the final Turkish siege. In the autumn of 1452 Isidore of Kiev, now a Roman cardinal, arrived at Constantinople with the union decree, which was solemnly read out in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia on 12 December. Isidore, who was anxious that everything should go smoothly, reported that it was well received. But his Italian assistant, Leonard of Chios, Archbishop of Mitylene, wrote angrily that few people were present and many officials boycotted the ceremony. Certainly, though during the last few months of the Empire’s existence Saint Sophia was served by Latin and by a handful of unionist clergy, its altars were almost deserted. The vast majority of the clergy and the congregations of the city would have nothing to do with them...

The last emperor, Constantine XI, was a uniate, and was not even crowned in Constantinople, but in Mystra, because of the opposition of the zealots of Orthodoxy. Even after he returned to Constantinople in 1449 he was never...

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62 Pope Nicholas V wrote to him: “From this man [the imperial legate, Andronicus Vryennios] and from your own letters, we have learned that you desire union and accept the synodal decree” (P.G. 160, 1201B). See “The Long-Awaited King”, Orthodox Christian Witness, May 7/20, 1979. And Bishop Leonard of Chios wrote: “Through the diligence and honesty of the said Cardinal, Isidore of Kiev, and with the assent (if it was not insincere) of the emperor and the senate, the holy union was sanctioned and solemnly decreed on December 12th, the feast of Saint Spiirydon, the bishop” (quoted in Judith Herrin, “The Fall of Constantinople”, History Today, vol. 53, № 6, June, 2003, p. 15). St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite believed that Constantine was not a uniate and therefore inscribed him in some calendars. But there appears to be no
officially crowned.\textsuperscript{63} The last step in the apostasy came in December, 1452: a uniate liturgy in which the Pope was commemorated was celebrated by Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev in Hagia Sophia. With both emperor and patriarch heretics, and the holiest shrine in Orthodoxy defiled by the communion of heresy, the protection of the Mother of God deserted the Empire, which had ceased to be the instrument of God’s purpose in the world, and allowed it to be conquered by the Turkish Sultan Mehmet II…

And so on the morning of May 29, 1453, writes Andrew Wheatcroft, “after fifty-three days of desperate resistance, the Ottoman janissaries broke through the walls into the city. By custom they were entitled to three days of looting in any city they had taken by storm. At first they killed everyone they found alive. From the Church of St. Mary of the Mongols high above the Golden Horn, a torrent of blood rained down the hill towards the harbour. The soldiers broke into the churches, ripping out the precious objects, raping or killing anyone who caught their fancy. In the afternoon the sultan made his formal entry, and went directly to the Church of the Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia. There he ordered an end to the pillage and destruction and directed that the great church should become the chief mosque of the city. Ducas, in his \textit{Historia Turco-Byzantina}, records the day:

“’He [Mehmed] summoned one of his vile priests who ascended the pulpit to call out his foul prayer. The son of iniquity, the forerunner of Antichrist, ascending the holy altar, offered the prayer. Alas, the calamity! Alack, the horrendous deed! Woe is me! What has befallen us? Oh! Oh! What have we witnessed? An infidel Turk, standing on the holy altar in whose foundation the relics of Apostles and Martyrs have been deposited! Shudder, O sun! Where is the Lamb of God, and where is the Son and Logos of the Father Who is sacrificed thereon, and eaten, and never consumed?

“Truly we have been reckoned as frauds! Our worship has been reckoned as nothing by the nations. Because of our sins the temple [Hagia Sophia] which was rebuilt in the name of the Wisdom of the Logos of God, and is called the Temple of the Holy Trinity, and Great Church and New Sion, today has become an altar of barbarians, and has been named and has become the House of Muhammad. Just is Thy judgement, O Lord.’”\textsuperscript{64}"

doubt that he was a uniate, having received communion from Cardinal Isidore a few hours before his death, and therefore cannot be counted as an Orthodox saint. Lebedev writes: “Whatever might be said in his defence, nevertheless the last Orthodox Byzantine Emperor was a traitor to Orthodoxy. His betrayal is the more shameful the less it was sincere. Here are the words by which the Emperor and those who thought like him tried to pacify the crowd which did not want the unia; they said: ‘Be patient a little, wait until God has delivered the capital for the great dragon [the Turks], who wants to devour it. Then you will see whether our reconciliation with the azymites [the Latins] was sincere.’”\textsuperscript{(op. cit., p. 392).}

\textsuperscript{63} Tsipanlis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 74.

However, we must not forget those Byzantines who remained true Romans to the end. These included St. Mark of Ephesus and his disciple Gennadius Scholarius. And then there were the metropolitans who signed the union but later renounced their signatures, concerning whom Michael Ducas records that, on returning from the council of Florence, “as the metropolitans disembarked from the ships the citizens greeted them as was customary, asking ‘What of our business? What of the Council? Did we prevail?’ And they answered: ‘We have sold our faith; we have exchanged true piety for impiety; we have betrayed the pure Sacrifice and become upholders of unleavened bread…”

Conclusion

So the City fell because it betrayed the Faith... And yet we return to the conundrum posed at the beginning of this article: why should the punishment for this betrayal have been so final in 1453, when the majority of the people had already rejected the union, and in spite of the fact that earlier betrayals of the Faith, no less serious and much more long lasting, had not resulted in final defeat? The clue lies in the fact that, in spite of seeing the falseness of the union, and even while refusing to visit the churches where the Pope was commemorated, the Byzantines followed their uncrowned and unanointed, uniate and apostate emperor to the final, bitter end...

This is ironic indeed. As noted above, the Byzantines were extraordinarily free in disposing of their sovereigns: in 74 out of 109 Byzantine reigns, the throne was seized by a coup. But they were not overthrown because they had betrayed the Faith. They were killed or mutilated simply because, in the opinion of some army commander, they were bad rulers. And the Church and the people usually acquiesced in the deed...

K.N. Leontiev tried to defend the Byzantines: “They drove out the Caesars, changed them, killed them. But nobody touched the holiness of Caesarism itself. They changed the people, but nobody changed its basic organization.”

But was he correct? Was Caesarism truly seen as holy? Is not the truth rather that the Byzantine attitude to the imperial power veered, for most of its history, from one unchristian extreme to the other, from the extreme of idolatry (the emperor as god) to the extreme of sacrilege (the emperor as a mere mortal, who could be removed by force if “the mandate of heaven” deserted him)? In neither case was the Lord’s command: “Touch not Mine anointed ones” (Psalm 104.15) seen as applying to emperors, and emperors continued to be slaughtered right until the first Fall of the City in 1204.

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65 Quoted in Norwich, op. cit., p. 388.

But then, under the impact of that terrible tragedy, attitudes began to change. Emperor Theodore I Lascaris received the physical sacrament of anointing to the kingdom for the first time in Byzantine history - over six centuries since the sacrament had first been used in the barbarian lands of the British Isles, on the one hand, and Southern Arabia, on the other. And the effects were felt immediately: the Lascarid dynasty was the most pious and effective in Byzantine history, even if - and perhaps partly because - their rule was exerted in the more modest conditions of Nicaean exile and not in the pomp and splendour of Constantinople.

Moreover, emperors were no longer killed by their own people... However, with the last Byzantine dynasty, that of the Palaeologi, this apparent improvement in morals was compromised by what amounted to a deviation from the faith. For the emperor was now the Anointed one - both physically and spiritually, and as such he was untouchable... With the signing of the concordat between the Church and the uniate Emperor John V, the Emperor had a control over the Church that the iconoclast emperors could only have dreamed of. Moreover, nobody had twisted the Church’s arm: the hierarchs had surrendered their power voluntarily and without compulsion...

From now on, even if the emperor betrayed the Faith he could not be removed - or, if some still thought he should be removed, nobody called on the people to do it. Thus Michael VIII died a uniate, and was cursed after his death - but he was not removed in his lifetime. John V submitted to Rome - and remained on the throne. John VIII signed the unia in 1439 - and kept his throne. Constantine XI remained faithful to the unia - and kept his throne until an unbeliever captured it...

And so the emperors were no longer seen as gods, as in pagan times. Nor did they have pretensions to be priests, as in the times of the iconoclasts. And yet for all practical purposes they were god-kings and king-priests. For they were untouchable. In fact, they were the lynch-pin upon which the whole Byzantine system of government, both political and ecclesiastical, rested; for as Patriarch Anthony said, “it is impossible for Christians to have a Church, but not have an Emperor”.

And yet this was a lie, as the patriarchs knew better than anybody else. For whereas, from the time of the concordat, the emperor’s ever-decreasing rule extended over Constantinople, Thessalonica and the Peloponnese, and little else, the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch was truly universal in the Orthodox world, extending far beyond the bounds of the Empire - to Serbia in the West, to Russia in the north, and to the Turkish-occupied lands in the East. So why did the powerful patriarchs fawn on, and bow down to the almost powerless emperors?
The paradox is explained by the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was increasingly Greek in its orientation – and Greek hopes centred exclusively on the Empire, and specifically on Constantinople. In 1204 the patriarchs had been prepared to fight on even after the fall of the City – and had constructed a viable and prosperous realm outside it. But not now... In a previous age, they might have blessed and supported a *translatio imperii* to some foreign land that was still devoted to the ideals of the Christian Empire – Romania, perhaps, or Moscow. But not now...

The fatal weakness of the Byzantines had been their placing the security of the Empire above that of the Church, the earthly kingdom above the Heavenly Kingdom. Like Judah in the time of Jeremiah, they tried to play off one despotic power against another – and lost to both. Unlike their great ancestors, who had often defied heretical emperors for the sake of the Faith, they tried to preserve their earthly kingdom at the price of the Kingdom of Heaven, forgetting that the whole glory of the Christian Empire lay in its readiness to live and die for its Heavenly King; "for here we have no lasting city, but seek the City which is to come" (*Hebrews* 13.14).

Unable to present a truly Catholic – in the sense of universal, non-nationalistic - vision of Christian society to the world, the Byzantines fell into a false union with, and submission to, the West with its heretical, but more explicitly universal vision. And so they lost the name of Rome, whose whole glory, even when her dominion was no longer universal, lay in her *universal vision*, and “where there is no vision, the people perish” (*Proverbs* 29.18). Thereafter, their successors no longer called themselves Romans, but Greeks (only their Turkish conquerors kept the memory in the phrase *Millet Rum*, where *Rum* means “Rome”).

Great-Prince Basil had been right, “We have a Church,” he said, “but we do not have an emperor”. But the Byzantines could not and would not believe this, even when it was obvious that their heretical “emperor” was leading them to political and spiritual disaster. The universal vision of Christian Rome had been narrowed to a terribly debilitating concentration on one speck of dust. And so, in order that this extreme narrowness of vision should not contract to complete blindness, the Lord in His great mercy removed even that speck from their sight...

*Vladimir Moss.*

*January 13/26, 2010.*

*Afterfeast of the Theophany.*