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THE MISSION OF THE FINNISH ORTHODOX CHURCH
AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE
ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

~summary~

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Key Words

Archbishopric of Karelia and All Finland

Finland

Nordic country

Uusi Valamo (New Valamo)

Konevitsa

Petsamo

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Orthodox organization

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Archbishop Herman Aav

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Archbishop Johannes Rinne

Archbishop Leo Makkonen

Patriarch Justinian Marina

Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu

THE MISSION OF THE FINNISH ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

~summary~

Through the help of the genuine journey this research is, we look at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Karelia and All Finland from several points of view. We notice how different it is from the Romanian Orthodox Church, if we are to consider the diversity of Orthodoxy, and in the same time the same, both being united in the body whose Head is Christ.

We discover or rediscover this Church as an autonomous subject of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. We realize that she is almost one thousand years old, preceding in those areas the arrival of Roman-Catholicism, later converted to Lutheranism, through the work of one of the first Finnish Lutherans in history, bishop Mikael Agricola, father of the Finnish literary and written language.

Finnish Orthodoxy is a result of Russian missionary monks' work. Their method of missionary work was the establishment of monasteries, from the great Lake Ladoga, up to the shores of the Arctic Ocean, in the region of Petsamo. These first missionaries actually remained in the collective memory of the people as well as of the Church as the Enlighteners of Karelia, and through it of all Finland. They are Saints Sergius and Herman of Valamo, Arseni of Konevitsa, Triphon of Petsamo and Alexander of Svir. Saint Herman of Alaska was added to this list. He left from Valamo in order to take the light of faith through Siberia, all the way to North America. Orthodoxy brought by these saints survived the Swedish first Catholic, than Protestant rule of the Finnish territory. In the end of the 19th century, an orthodox diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church was established, for political reasons included, since Finland became a Grand Duchy of the Tsarist Empire in 1809.

Finland proclaimed its independence from Russia on the 6th of December 1917, on the background of the unrest caused by the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution. There was a need complete self-determination and total break from the Russian influence, and so the young Finnish state helped its Orthodox Church to obtain from the freshly reestablished Patriarchate of Moscow and its Patriarch Tikhon a generous autonomy. Because of the turmoil in which the Russian Church entered shortly thereafter, as consequence of the new soviet regime, church and state officials turned to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and asked for autocephaly. It was not granted, but instead they got autonomy within the Patriarchate, which was stated through the Tomos issued by Patriarch Meletios the 4th and the Holy Synod of the Church of

Constantinople in 1923. The balance thus reached was badly severed by the loss of 90% of Church property and the evacuation of 75% of her members, because of the Winter and Continuation Wars between 1940 and 1945. In spite of getting almost in a state of a Church in exile, through the constant help of the Finnish state, she healed and even became an active member internationally in inter-Christian dialogues. All was crowned by the becoming member on her own of the World Council of Churches. The Finnish Church got strongly involved in organizing inter-orthodox and inter-church meetings, the later as representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In the '70s and '80s it had a rich activity in the pan-orthodox youth organization of Syndesmos.

When it comes to territorial organization, the Finnish Orthodox Church started as a plain bishopric led by a bishop. Then it was elevated to the rank of archbishopric. In 1925 a second diocese was established, so the total number grew to two, but it took 10 years in order to find a suitable candidate for the new cathedra. In less than a century the archbishop's city of residence was moved several times, mainly because of the war, from Viipuri/Vyborg to Sortavala/Serdopol, than shortly to Helsinki and finally to Kupio, where it still exists up to now. There are some opinions in the Finnish Church that say that due to the new demographical changes with people moving south, including orthodox, in the not very distant future the archbishop's cathedra will be again brought to the countries capital, this time for good. The current administrative organization came in force in the end of the '70s. It is divided in three dioceses: Karelia, Helsinki and Oulu, with an archbishop, two metropolitans and a permanent position of auxiliary bishop for the archbishop, holding the title of "of Joensuu." The titles of the hierarchs follow the Greek practice.

The Archbishopric of Finland possesses spiritual fathers that she reveres all of them cultivated in the Monastery of Valamo, the hallmark of Finnish Orthodoxy. She is a Church of numerous associations, organizations and foundations, and most of all a Church of democracy, a thing that even being good per se, it is highly unusual and untraditional for the Orthodox Church as a whole. Theological education is done through a department of Orthodox theology at the University of Eastern Finland, and a Theological seminary in Joensuu that works in conjunction with the university. Throughout the Finnish Orthodox Church several religious and theological publications are issued.

The matter of autocephaly was discussed several times in the history of the Archbishopric of Finland. First, it was demanded in 1923 in Constantinople at the negotiations for changing the jurisdiction from Moscow's to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's. A new aspiration for this desideratum grew in the end of the '70s,

beginning of the '80s, encouraged by the State, but to the great disappointment of Archbishop Paavali Olmari, it never came to pass. Currently, one can feel this ideal in the air, and the matter was unofficially brought to the present Ecumenical Patriarch. His answer apparently was that the issue must be left for the coming Great and Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church to decide on.

The relations with the Church of Constantinople helped in creating a stronger identity of the Orthodox Finns, who still oscillate between these two great Orthodox traditions: Russian, from which they came into existence, and Greek, into which they were welcomed at the change between the first and second quarters of the 20th century. **Actually, this combination of Orthodox traditions, Russian and Greek, grafted on a Protestant background, represents maybe the shortest and most comprehensive description of the Finnish Orthodoxy.**

The characteristics of missionary work done by the Finnish Orthodox Church come from the mentioned events in its history and the Church's own specific traits. It does both inner mission and, surprisingly for a small and Orthodox Church, foreign mission. Inner mission is performed through the collaboration between parishes and organizations especially established for this purpose. The work is done considering age and social groups. There are missionary programs for children, youth, adults, seniors, families, people affected by depression. The main means of doing it are organizing camps for all mentioned above, socializing being a key factor to deliver the Christian teaching and to fight the negative effects of contemporary society. There are clubs organized for all age ranges by local parishes, with diverse activities according to the participants' profiles. Educational material is published, magazines are automatically sent by parishes to children's houses, and so on. Monasteries are involved in missionary work first by their mere existence, and second by translation and publishing of spiritual literature, by the daily services, by presentations held throughout the country. At New Valamo functions the Valamo Lay Academy (Valamon kansanopisto). There amazingly diverse courses are being taught, from orthodox faith and icon painting to writing an autobiography or silver jewelry crafting. **But still, the most important missionary means of unifying the community is and remains the Holy Eucharist.** In the Archbishopric of Finland most of the participants at the liturgy receive Communion. The exception are the ones that don't, unlike the situation existing in Romania. This doesn't happen because the Eucharist isn't taken seriously and thus demonetized. It happens because this *is* what Christ taught us, even if it may sound incredible, shocking or surprising to one's ear. Him we acknowledge

as Founder of our Church, even if we seem to fail understanding what He meant by the words “Drink ye all of it” (Matthew 26:27).

The mission of the Finnish Orthodox Church has an important work done abroad too. It grows from being aware that they (too) are the Church, and the Church is sent in the world by God-the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, thus being missionary par excellence, before any other aspect. The work done is two sided. One is assisting the local Church in her teaching work, the other is help given by running development project or offering humanitarian aid. These two types of activities were always performed in conjunction with the local Church, like for example in Kenya, within the jurisdiction of the Alexandrian Patriarchate. When humanitarian aid was provided, even if they cooperated with the local Church, things like denomination, religion, ethnicity or gender were never taken into consideration when helping someone. Such work was done in Eastern Europe: in Russian Karelia, in the Republic of Moldova, in Africa: in Uganda, in Kenya, in Tanzania, in Ethiopia, etc, in the Middle East, in South-East Asia.

The first archbishop of the Orthodox Church as part of the Finnish state and the Ecumenical Patriarchate was Herman Aav, of Estonian descent. He led the Church in stable times, followed by tragedy and then by new stability. He clarified many problems of church life by having rich correspondence with Constantinople and its many patriarchs from the first half of the 20th century: Gregory the 7th, Constantine the 6th, Basil the 3rd, Fotios the 2nd, Benjamin the 1st, Maximos the 5th, and also Athenagoras the 1st after the last world war. He had correspondence with the Romanian patriarchs Nicodim and Justinian. During his time, when it comes to the relations with the Romanian Church, one can find out that Finnish students studied in Romania, in Cernăuți and in Bucharest, works of Romanian professors of theology were translated into Finnish, or they themselves helped in clarifying the matter of the church calendar. The Finnish archbishopric is only Orthodox Church in the world that celebrates also the Resurrection according to the new calendar.

On the archbishop’s throne, after the retiring of Herman Aav, followed Paavali Olmari, of Russian descent, but who identified himself totally with the Church he led. He was a talented liturgist and a promoter of the Eucharistic awakening of the past century that in our case cannot be seen in most of the places. His ideas and writings influenced the whole Church that even today owes its Eucharistic practice to this hierarch that was a fervent supporter of going back to the apostolic Christian origins. Relations with Constantinople tightened, but in spite that, his wish of having an Ecumenical Patriarch as guest in Finland didn’t come to pass. There moments

when his views collided with Constantinople's, because of the relations with the Orthodox Church in America. OCA had received autocephaly from the Moscow Patriarchate, a fact strongly contested by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Paavali had to conform as a consequence of the threats coming from the Bosphorus, not without explicitly expressing his frustration and discontent generated by the behavior of the Ecumenical Throne. Relations with Romania got to a new stage through the bilateral visits started by the Finnish hierarch and returned also by the Romanians under the communist regime, like the one paid by Bishop Teoctist of Arad, the future patriarch of Romania. An important correspondence is kept in the Archives of the Central Church Administration in Kuopio from both the times of Patriarch Justinian and Patriarch Iustin.

Paavali Olmari retired and a new Finnish archbishop meant new traits in church relations. First of all, Johannes Rinne was the first of Finnish descent, and not only that but also belonging to the small minority that has Swedish as mother tongue. He was a former Lutheran priest converted to Orthodoxy, doctor of the Swedish language university of Turku called the Åbo Academy (the Swedish name of the former Finnish capital city). He studied in Greece afterwards, and was ordained deacon and priest right at Patriarchal cathedral in Phanar, by one of the metropolitans of the Ecumenical Throne. Having so close relations with the Greeks, he was the first Finnish archbishop during whose time an ecumenical patriarch visited Finland. He had a very rich correspondence with both patriarchs Demetrios the 1st and Bartholomew the 1st that led the Oriental Church during the primacy of this Nordic archbishop. The time of Johannes Rinne on the throne in Kuopio meant, especially after the so-called Revolution from December 1989 in Romania, a climax of the relations with the Romanian Patriarchate. He was invited numerous times by Patriarch Teoctist, he attended events, he visited Walachia, Moldavia, Ardeal, Oltenia, he developed friendships with Romanian hierarchs, and he had correspondence with several of them, including Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală of Ardeal or Metropolitan Daniel Ciobotea of Moldavia Bukovina, the current Patriarch of Romania.

His Eminence Leo is the 4th archbishop of Finland. Being of Karelian descent, he was elected by the General Church Assembly after the retiring of his predecessor, as all the Finnish archbishops in history did. His primacy was marked by the exclusion, starting from 2008 and 2009, of the Finnish Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate from the both the synaxis of the Orthodox primates and the inter-Christian dialogues. This took place because of the arguments between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate on the matter of the Orthodox Church in Estonia. Maybe as a consequence of the same facts, the relations with the

Romanian Patriarchate diminished significantly. The last official meeting between His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania and His Eminence Archbishop Leo of Finland took place on the occasion of the enthronement of His Beatitude, in the year 2007. Of course, there still continued to exist private visits between Finnish and Romanian hierarchs, as well as academic exchanges of professors and students, from both sides.

As a general conclusion I will quote the words said with the occasion of a visit to Romania of Archbishop Johannes Rinne, during a halt at the diocesan headquarters in Râmnicu Vâlcea, when the Finnish hierarch enjoyed the generous and permanent company of Patriarch Teoctist. At that moment, this illustrious Romanian of blessed memory said words that perhaps hold within them the whole of the theology: “Let us not scatter from the treasure of our eternal heritage of Orthodox teaching which we to witness to the world of today, in order to fulfill the Savior’s word: <I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do>(John 17:4)”¹

In the end, I express my hope that the present dissertation will encounter the interest of the academic community.

¹ Prof. Liviu Stoina, Vizita în România a Înalt Prea Sfințitului Ioan, Arhiepiscopul Kareliei și al Întregii Finlande, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, Buletinul Oficial al Patriarhiei Române*, Bucharest, Year CXII, No. 1-6, January-June, 1994, p.120.