CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL ECCLESIASTICAL VOCABULARY.
ECCLESIASTICAL DIGNITIES, ORDERS AND INSTITUTIONS

1. The Orthodox Church in the System of Bulgarian Mediaeval Law

The Church as an institution held a special and exceptionally important place in public and political life, in everyday activities, in culture, and in practically all spheres of life in mediaeval Europe. The Middle Ages are essentially defined in terms of Christianity, the institutional form of which is the Church. In materialising the basic ideology of the epoch, the Church naturally has a direct relation to the state and law. However, in this sphere the situation is complex and ambiguous. I will try to present it here briefly, with a special emphasis on the fact that any one-sided, simple definition could lead to its incorrect, even utterly false interpretation. I would also like to stress at the very start that the chosen range of texts on which the glossary is based is not representative for the ecclesiastic vocabulary and does not provide a sufficiently complete idea about it. For that reason, and in consideration of the topic of power and relations connected with power, I will confine myself only to the basic institutional ecclesiastic vocabulary.

1.1

First, I should highlight two different conceptions as to what the Church is: one is from the perspective of Christian ecclesiology, and the other from the perspective of institutions in the visible world.¹ Christian theology devotes special attention to the Church and its interpretation. The definition of the Church is included in the very Credo, formulated by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (AD 325) and subsequently by the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (AD 381); the Creed provided the briefest and clearest possible definition

of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. It is not coincidental
that the article regarding the Church follows immediately after the
one regarding the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity, which essen-
tially explains Divinity as such. There the Church is defined as „one,
hoLy, cHaLiCiC (uNIVersaL), aNd aPostoLic“,2 which provides us with the
basic dimensions for understanding it: It is one, for it encompasses
all Christians in the world and outside the world;3 it is one, because it
encompasses both the visible and the invisible world: its members are
not only the living faithful but the dead as well, and the saints, and also
the asomatic celestial beings—angels, cherubim, and seraphim. It is
precisely this oneness of the Church that makes it universal, regardless
of the existence of different ecclesiastical organisations and admin-
istrations, which refer to a hierarchy in the visible world alone. The
Church is likewise universal, because, even in its least manifestations,
it includes all the faithful. Thus, every separate Orthodox liturgy,
Eucharistic sacrament, is administered not only for the Christians
present, but also for the whole world, and that is why it is not repeated
in the same day, in the same temple, or by the same clergyman. The
one and universal Church is apostolic, because its foundation goes
back to the times of the apostles and is connected with the earthly
life of the Saviour and His immediate disciples, the holy apostles; it
was founded on the day of Pentecost by God, who descended in the
appearance of tongues of fire. The Church is holy, because we discover
in it the Divine presence: God is head of the Church and continues to
be present in it through the Eucharist.4

Orthodox (and also Roman Catholic) ecclesiology looks upon the
Church as a Divine-human organism that encompasses the visible
and invisible world and corresponds to the Divine-human nature of
the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Christian theology, the Church is
Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ. Hence, the Christians belonging to
the Church are members of this Body and thereby fulfil the mission of
salvation of the Son of God, Who is the Incarnate Word, Who became
the Son of Human in order that humans should become sons of God.
In this sense, and interpreted in this way, the Church does not coin-
cide with the earthly ecclesiastic organisation, with the hierarchy in
the visible world, with the administration and all the human elements

2 Milaš, Pravoslavno tsârkovno pravo, p. 227.
3 Milaš, Pravoslavno tsârkovno pravo, pp. 228–32.
4 Milaš, Pravoslavno tsârkovno pravo, pp. 224–6, 239 ff.