

# Global Religion

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## Religion global

*Herausgegeben von*

Patrick Becker (Erfurt)  
Claudia Jahnel (Bochum)

*Wissenschaftlicher Beirat*

Afe Adogame (Princeton)  
Sharon A. Bong (Kuala Lumpur)  
Tomáš Halík (Prague)  
Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez (Mexico City/Boston)  
Markus Mühling (Wuppertal)  
Myriam Renaud (Chicago)

**BAND 2**

Bernhard Grümme, Claudia Jahnel, Martin Radermacher,  
Claudia Rammelt, Jens Schlamelcher (Hg.)

# Globale Christentümer

*Theologische und religionswissenschaftliche  
Perspektiven*



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# Ecclesiological Dynamics between Identity and Unity in Orthodoxy

*Primacy, Synodality, Authority*

*Mihail Comănoiu*

## 1. Introduction

Global economic, political and migratory developments have led to massive challenges related to the mission and pastoral care of Orthodox believers beyond the borders of countries with Orthodox majority. Locally, the claims for more autonomy of churches in Eastern Europe are increasing. In this context, in which global and local challenges interpenetrate, the need for an equally recognised institutional arbiter to equitably mitigate increasing tensions in Eastern Orthodoxy is urgently needed. A multitude of questions concern the Church's relations with society: who is the authorised voice of Orthodoxy that can represent the whole Orthodox Church? What is the structure of the universal organisation of the Church? Who is the guarantor of the unity of the Church and who takes actions for the development of the mission and witness of Orthodox Christianity?

The Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences in Chambésy, Switzerland, preparing the Holy and Great Synod (1971, 1982, 1986, 2009, 2015) and the Holy and Great Synod in Crete (2016) itself as well as the bilateral dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church highlighted the cultural sensitivities and different theological accents in the Orthodox Churches. There are three major ecclesiological challenges of the Orthodox Church today on the global level: firstly, identity and ethnicity connected with ecclesial phenomenon of migration and diaspora realities; secondly, ecclesial autocephaly (self-governing) and its implications for the eucharistic communion and the unity of the Church; thirdly, expression of authority in context of the relation between primacy and synodality. These challenges are intertwined particularly with the following determinant factors: the order of *diptychs* (fixed order of the fourteen primates of the Orthodox Churches recognised by all Orthodox Churches), the procedure right of granting autocephaly and the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the content of the primate at universal level and the right for jurisdiction on diaspora. In sum, it could be said, the quintessence of contemporary dynamics in Orthodoxy lies on the tensions between local and universal. The interplay of these factors often creates tensions between local

Churches, some aspects thereof being analysed in the present contribution, not only in their immediate social or political effects, but also in their theological dimension.

## 2. Theological Foundations of the Church

### 2.1 *Communion and Unity in the Eucharistic Ecclesiology*

The contemporary underlined eucharistic ecclesiology<sup>1</sup> elaborate on the unity of the Church through the manifestation of communion in Eucharist. According to the principle of Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110) “where the bishop is, there is the church” (Letter to the Smyrnaeans, VIII, 2), each diocese is the expression of the Church in her fullness. The unity between local Churches found its expression in the following elements: common celebrations, receiving communion, and commemorating of primates during the liturgy according to their place in the diptychs.<sup>2</sup> According to the “ecclesiology of communion”, Orthodox Church expresses its internal unity in the communion of the local Churches with each other, as long as they preserve the same tradition, dogma, canonical regulations and liturgy. Apart from this, unity is achieved also in the form of synodal leadership that reflects communion in common decisions. The communion of bishops within a local synod is reflected also in the liturgical assembly: they are in full harmony with the protos of the synod or of the presider of the Holy Liturgy. This unity of the bishops is the concrete expression of the diversity in unity, of the plurality that lives fully the freedom in authority while being subordinated to the first among bishops or to the primate. This form of authority gives the concrete form of a spiritual paternity on the one hand and of the power of leadership, governing the synod on the other.

The equality and consubstantiality of all local Orthodox Churches – a fundamental principle of Eucharistic ecclesiology – together with the idea that each Church is the complete Universal Church and that the Eucharist manifests the real presence of the one Christ, ensure a “perichoresis” (interpenetration) between the local and universal Church, where each of them is co-contained by the other.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the integrality of the universal Church does not

- 
- 1 See Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas, *Eucharist. Bishop. Church. The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Brookline 2001.
  - 2 See Daniel Galadza, *Autocephaly and the diptychs. The practice of commemorating bishops in liturgical texts*, in: Marie-Hélène Blanchet et al. (eds.), *Autocéphalies. L'exercice de l'indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales. (IX<sup>e</sup>–XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Rome 2021, 81–110.
  - 3 Andreas Andreopoulos, *Synodality and Local Churches: The Ecclesiology of the Apostolic Church in the Era of Globalisation*, in: *Church Studies* 5 (2008), 77.

amount to a mere sum of the plurality of local Churches to achieve its oneness, nor does it require the prioritisation of the universal Church before the local Churches to ensure the unity, but the co-affirmation of the one and the many through the presence of the Head Christ.

## 2.2 *The Church in the Image of Trinitarian Koinonia*

The Church has its origin in the love of the Holy Trinity for mankind; this is made tangible in the incarnation, life, sufferings and resurrection of the Saviour Jesus Christ, followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost. The life of the Church is the image of the Holy Trinity, which is imprinted on the Church within the Eucharistic community, in the form of the communion of love. The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of Crete of the Orthodox Church states that “the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is a divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, a foretaste and living of the latter in the Holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of things to come.”<sup>4</sup> This eschatological vision of the Church embraces the historical reality with the purpose of transforming it in the love of the Triune God through the sacrifice of Christ.

From the moment of its foundation, the Church bears the experience of the Trinitarian life, being the place where Christ is present through the Holy Spirit in order to share with humanity a new life, a life of love and communion. Today’s Orthodox theology is marked by this double emphasis on the Church as the Body of Christ (cf. Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29) and communion in the image of the Holy Trinity. These two views are not antagonistic, but complementary, reflecting different ways of placing the theological emphasis. On the soteriological level, the work of Christ in the Church refers to the sharing of the reality of the communion of interpersonal and eternal love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity with humanity. Through Christ, the Head of the Church, believers gain participation in the life of the Holy Trinity.

The Church is thus the space in which the Holy Trinity is present, not only as a model of communion, but especially as a source for the authentic life of interpersonally shared love. The words of Jesus “That all may be one, as You, Father, in Me and I in You, so be they in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:21–22) show that the unity in communion is first and foremost lived unity at the Trinitarian level, as well as God’s desire that everybody may share in it. This biblical text also reveals the

4 Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council> (12.1.2022).



condition and model of the authentic unity of people in communion, namely the unity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church, in the vision of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) is “the image and icon of God, as one who has the same work as Him, by imitation and imagination.”<sup>5</sup> When speaking of ecclesial communion, one thinks foremost of the Trinitarian *koinonia* which is the perfect model of interpersonal union and communion for all people. The model of trinitarian communion is to be understood as “mutual spiritual habitation or mutual devotion, which is the most perfect form of communion.”<sup>6</sup> Concerning the identity and distinction of persons it has been emphasised that “there is certainly an inner order of *koinonia* due to the distinction of Persons who retain their own identity, even in their most perfect and supreme union, but this order in no way negate the equality of Persons, the consubstantiality and fullness of each which is at the same time the fullness of all.”<sup>7</sup> This model of infinite communion is the source of the unity of the Church.

### 3. Autocephaly and Identity

#### 3.1 *Achieving Autonomy while Upholding Unity*

Orthodox Christianity in the global world struggles to maintain the balance between jurisdictional independence and ecclesial authority, while manifesting co-responsibility for the unity of the Church. Autocephaly, as a principle of organising local autonomy of Orthodox Churches, provides the ecclesial framework for adapting the mission and public involvement of the Church in a particular national context, while observing historical, cultural and political particularities of a country.

The history of autocephaly is closely linked to the history of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of nation-states in Eastern Europe in the 19th century. If a particular nation-state was in the situation of obtaining political and territorial independence, it was natural that the local Church within the confines of the new state would strive to achieve an equal form of independence from the Mother Church. Beside the four historical Patriarchal Thrones (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem) and Church of Cyprus, which were recognised as autocephalous by an Ecumenical Council (canon 28 of IV Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon and III Ecumenical

5 Maximus the Confessor, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 91 (Paris 1863), col. 664.

6 Patriarch Daniel, *La Joie de la Fidélité*, Paris 2009, 228.

7 *Ibidem*, 228.

Council in Ephesus), all other local Churches received a Tomos of autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The historical events related to the apparition of the autocephalous Churches should not be associated to ethnophyletism (exaggeration of national sentiment in the detriment of the Christian identity), since the will of autonomy of one church in one region had positive effects in strengthening the communion of local Orthodox Churches, while they found themselves in the situation of freely organise themselves. For this reason, “autocephaly should not be confused with isolation or unity with constraint”.<sup>8</sup>

Achieving ecclesial independence is also the result of the broader public awareness of the role of Churches in supporting the morale of people, who have experienced political or economic hardships, when not part of an autonomous political entity. This type of pastoral-protectionist attitude can be found especially in the Balkans. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the rehabilitation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as an institution of the Ottoman Empire under the Sultan Mehmet II (1432–1481) and in the context of the millet regulations, which ensured a particular position for the Church of Constantinople and specific rights and privileges in relations to the local Churches in the Empire, a new type of symphony between state and church emerged.<sup>9</sup> Its role was to maintain confessional peace in the Ottoman Empire. It is easy to understand that this act of recognition of a single ecclesial authority in the Ottoman Empire created the premises for a dominant position of the Ecumenical Throne in Constantinople in relation to other local Churches. Moreover, the Patriarch of Constantinople was part of the complex power networks of the Empire, being also responsible for ensuring that the Christians subjects obeyed and respected the law and were loyal to the Ottoman rulers.<sup>10</sup>

The Greek revolution in 1821 shook the unity of the Ottoman Empire and created the premises for unilateral declaration of autocephaly by the Greek Church in 1833. Consequently, the Ottomans pressured the Ecumenical Patriarchate to contain the situation, which in turn provoked the break of communion between the Ecumenical Throne and the Church of Greece

8 HB Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *The Unity of the Church is the Gift of God and a Co-responsibility of the Clergy and the Lay Faithful*, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10/1 (2019), 13.

9 Tom Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan. Power, Authority and the Greek Orthodox Church in the early Ottoman Centuries*, Oxford 2015, 21–22.

10 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World. The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity*, London 2019, 31.

until 1850.<sup>11</sup> The recognition of the independence of the Balkan states triggered the request of the autocephaly by the Church of Serbia in 1879. This pattern was repeated when the status of Exarchate for the Church of Bulgaria was directly granted from the Sultan Abdülaziz in 1870, which determined a virulent reaction from the Church of Constantinople. As a consequence a synod of Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1872 condemned ethnophyletism, as ecclesiological heresy, which will cause a schism that will be repaired only in 1945, when the Ecumenical Throne will grant a Tomos of autocephaly to the Church of Bulgaria.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the Romania, autocephaly was affirmed by a declaration by the synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1872 and the subsequent consent of the Romanian Parliament which introduced the status of autocephaly in the state Constitution of 1882, after the Romanian united Principates achieved the political independence from the Ottoman Empire. The See of Constantinople officially granted the Romanian Orthodox Church the autocephaly Tomos in 1885.<sup>13</sup> In the 20th century the Ecumenical Patriarchate also delivered the autocephaly of other local Orthodox Churches: Church of Poland (1924), Church of Albania (1937), Church of Georgia (1990), Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia (1998).

In January 2019, The Ecumenical Patriarchate granted the autocephaly of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The synod of union led by the delegate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the presence of the president of Ukraine reunited two “schismatic” groups, the “Patriarchate of Kiev” led by patriarch Filaret Denysenko (b. 1929), former member of the metropolitan See of Ukraine belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate and the Autonomous Church of Ukraine under Metropolitan Makariy Maletych (b. 1944), as well as two bishops, members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>14</sup> This action provoked unprecedented tensions between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Throne. The Moscow Patriarchate

11 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World. The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity*, London 2019, 35.

12 Victor Roudometof, *The evolution of Greek Orthodoxy in the Context of World historical Globalisation*, in: Victor Roudometof/Vasilios N. Makrides (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece. The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics*, London 2010, 26.

13 Dan Ioan Mureșan, *The Romanian Tradition in: Augustine Casiday (ed.), The Orthodox Christian World*, London 2017, 149.

14 Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos For the Bestowal of the Ecclesiastical Status of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, <https://ec-patr.org/patriarchal-and-synodal-tomos-for-the-bestowal-of-the-ecclesiastical-status-of-autocephaly-to-the-orthodox-church-in-ukraine/> (16.2.2022).

perceived this recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as an “invasion” on his canonical jurisdiction and broke the Eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.<sup>15</sup> Although it has no immediate sacramental consequences and does not affect the integrity of other Orthodox Churches, these actions could create the premises for an extension of divisions in the Church. It should be noted that, theologically speaking, the unity of the Church is not the fruit of an external or legal form of organisation, but it carries in its very life the unity as an existential matrix given by the One who is the Head of the Church, Christ. Moreover, the unity of the Church is in itself indissoluble because it is sustained by the common work of all Persons of the Holy Trinity. In this sense, these divisions in the Church cannot affect the entire Church, yet the schism hurts those who break communion with the Universal Church.

The ecumenical nature of the Church and the manifestation of its mission on the universal level can suffer when the proclamation of autocephaly creates ecclesial dissensions between Churches claiming the right to offer this status to a local Church. The participation of Orthodox Churches in bilateral dialogues has been affected globally by these dissensions between local Churches. Specifically, the Moscow Patriarchate doesn't participate in those commissions in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate held a position of leadership.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the same Patriarchate claims that, by breaking the communion with Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch can no longer be called the spiritual leader of the approximately 300 million Orthodox.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the repeated calls of the primates of the other Orthodox Churches to encourage dialogue and co-responsibility for preserving the unity of the Church, didn't receive substantial echo. The meeting between the primates or representatives of the Orthodox Churches in Amman, held at the convocation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem<sup>18</sup>, also failed to generate a practical impulse to resolve the crisis. The very idea of convening a meeting by another Church than the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been the subject of criticism, especially

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- 15 Holy Synod expresses judgement about the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Kiev from 24 september 2021, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5848191.html> (16.2.2022).
  - 16 Radu Bordeianu, The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine: its impact outside of Ukraine, in: *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 62/3–4 (2020), 457–458.
  - 17 Holy Synod of Russian Orthodox Church expresses judgement about the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Kiev on 24 September 2021, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5848191.html> (12.2.2022).
  - 18 Inter-orthodox Consultation in Jordan, Amman in 2020 on <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/blog/2020/02/26/orthodox-primates-and-delegations-received-in-jordan-for-the-amman-fraternal-familial-gathering-dialogue-and-unity/> (15.2.2022).

concerning the debated issue of who has the canonical prerogatives to convene such pan-Orthodox meetings, since the Church of Constantinople convened all pan-Orthodox gatherings for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council in Crete.<sup>19</sup>

Tension between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Alexandria emerged soon after the recognition of the autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine. Recently, the Moscow Patriarchate took the decision to create a Russian Orthodox Exarchate in Africa, delegating a bishop for this structure and accepting in this structure priests belonging to the Patriarchate of Alexandria. With this measure, the Moscow Patriarchate did not express claims for the jurisdiction of Patriarchate of Alexandria, but declared that the Church of Alexandria, by entering in communion with the new Orthodox Church in Ukraine, cannot further provide canonical authority over her priests.<sup>20</sup>

The process of obtaining the autocephaly should ideally generate the strengthening of unity and facilitate the expanding of the mission of the Orthodox Church. The new autocephalous Church receives several rights that will provide the opportunity for this Church to better respond to local social-political challenges as well as to address global concerns. This rights relate to: election of bishops and of the primate of a local synod without the need of an external confirmation; autonomous organisation of the structure of the church (dioceses, metropolis); sanctification the holy Myron; judge on local disciplinary matters; proclamation of the veneration of local saints; administrate local theological schools and institutions; intensification of the pastoral care for own diaspora communities and parishes by consecrating priests and bishops<sup>21</sup>; initiation of bilateral dialogues with other confessions on an individual level and not in the name of the entire Orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

19 Letter of Ecumenical Patriarch to Patriarch of Jerusalem, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/ecumenical-patriarch-to-patriarch-of-jerusalem-dont-persist-in-the-initiative-of-a-meeting/> (16.2.2022).

20 Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of 28th January 2022 on <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5891378.html> (14.2.2022).

21 This right is contested by the Ecumenical Patriarchate who claim that the pastoral care for diaspora belong only the Ecumenical Patriarchate, based on a unilateral interpretation of the canon 28 of the Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon that would insure a canonical jurisdiction for the territories "occupied by the barbarians". See Vlassios Phidas, *Droit canon. Une perspective orthodoxe*, *Analecta Chambesiana* 1, Geneve 1998, 124.

22 Patriarch Daniel of Romania, *Comori ale Ortodoxiei. Explorări teologice în spiritualitatea liturgică și filocalică*, II edition, Bucharest 2021, 102.

### 3.2 *The Granting of Autocephaly as Process of Decentralisation of Mission*

According to the Greek canonist Vlassios Phidas, only an Ecumenical Council (pan-Orthodox Synod) would be able to deliver and ratify the status of autocephaly. This institution is the only legitimate organ of the Church that can take decisions concerning the structure and the organisation of the Church. If an Ecumenical Council cannot meet to decide on the proclamation of the autocephaly, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was traditionally untrusted to grant the Tomos by way of *oikonomia* (i.e., pastoral discernment and the benevolent application of the canons as opposed to *akribeia*, which refers to strict application of the canons) and with the concord of all local Orthodox Churches, a process that ultimately requires to be completed by the decision of a pan-Orthodox Council.<sup>23</sup> There are some theologians, who argue that the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the diptychs would confer it privileges and prerogatives that any other local Orthodox Church wouldn't have, being entitled to become the "interim voice of the Ecumenical Councils until the next Ecumenical Council meets".<sup>24</sup>

The conferring of a Tomos of autocephaly is based on canonical and customarily rights: the right of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to provide a Tomos of autocephaly and the right of a local Church, which exercises a jurisdictional administration of a territory, to accept the proclamation of autocephaly of a province belonging to her jurisdiction, which in turn will separate it from the Mother Church.<sup>25</sup> In order to find a consensus of all Orthodox Churches, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, after receiving the demand of a Mother Church regarding the receiving of a Tomos for a region belonging to her jurisdiction, should strive to reach a pan-Orthodox consensus concerning the matter, which is realised through the consent of the Church local synods.<sup>26</sup> Still the process involves some mandatory conditions for receiving autocephaly. The most important requirements concern the boundaries of the local Church, the number of bishops (minimum four), the apostolic succession, the independence of the state, and a regular Church life.<sup>27</sup>

23 Vlassios Phidas, *Droit canon. Une perspective orthodoxe*, *Analecta Chambesiana* 1, Genève 1998, 136.

24 Jaroslaw Buciora, *The Patriarchate of Constantinople: the Mother Church of the modern Orthodox Autocephalous Churches*, in: *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 62/3–4 (2020), 479.

25 Vlassios Phidas, *Droit canon. Une perspective orthodoxe*, *Analecta Chambesiana* 1, Genève 1998, 131.

26 *Ibidem*, 137–138.

27 *Ibidem*, 478.

The special emphasis of Orthodox ecclesiology on the role of the Eucharist in manifesting the unity of the Church concertedly by the rejection of a monarchical ecclesial structure, as in the Catholic Church, has eventually affected the view of primacy in the exercise of synodality. For this reason, the theologian Nicolas Lossky points out that nowadays the definition of the local Church could be confused with the autocephaly of a self-governing Church. This situation could lead to the tendency of emphasising the rights of each Church in the name of “historical justice”, as well as to a confusion regarding the relations of communion between the sister Churches, which would tend to increasingly resemble the relations between sovereign states.<sup>28</sup> This warning of Lossky has older roots, being linked to the decision of the Holy and Great Council in Constantinople in 1872, which condemned ethnophyletism as an ecclesiological heresy.<sup>29</sup>

Global ecclesial dynamics reveal the need for a mission articulated beyond the tensions between national identity and universal unity. Ecumenicity and universality of the Orthodox Church expressed through the manifestation of unity in the plurality of persons in the image of the Holy Trinity must not be affected by dissensions. Therefore, the plurality of local Churches united in the Eucharistic communion, common celebration of Liturgy, and commemoration of the primates of autocephalous Churches according to the diptychs set the ground for the visible universal ecclesial unity.

#### 4. Orthodox Church in Diaspora

##### 4.1 *Reshaping Ecclesial Territorialities through Migration*

It is to be expected that the economic and political context influences the life of Orthodox Churches. The major historic events as the socialist revolution in 1917–1918 in Russia, the conflict between the Turks and Greeks culminating with the great exodus of the Greek community from Turkey to Greece in 1920, the political chaos after the dismantling of USSR, the revolution in 1989 in Romania, the independence of Ukraine and of the Republic of Moldavia in 1991, generated waves of migration of orthodox Christians to Western countries. The phenomenon of migration does not only impact the Churches in

28 Nicolas Lossky, *Conciliarity-Primacy in a Russian Orthodox Perspective*, in: James F. Puglisi (ed.), *Petrine ministry and the unity of the church*, Minnesota 1999, 129.

29 Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, § 3, <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council> (17.1.2022).

their spread beyond the traditional (national) canonical territories due to the necessity of offering pastoral care and assistance, but also the adaptation of the mission of the Church on a global scale. In this sense, the migrational dynamic is the source of two major types of conflict: firstly, on the inner level of the religious communities, which need to affirm their identity in a different culture; secondly an external conflict involving these communities in the quarrel about their canonical jurisdiction. The second type of conflict, which is of interest for the present analysis, reflects tensions on the ecclesiological level and involves the claims of jurisdictional right of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the need of local Churches and diaspora communities to create their own ecclesiastical structures beyond the boundaries of their original countries. The issue of jurisdiction on the diaspora has its roots on a decision of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1922, which stated that all parishes and dioceses that are not located on the territorial jurisdiction of a local Church (namely inside the borders of a state), must be integrated into the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople, who thus assumes an exclusive right of jurisdiction of these communities.<sup>30</sup>

Orthodox diaspora represents the communitarian reality of those Christians who live outside the borders of a country of origin and who still cultivate their cultural identity and religious values, in a communitarian framework. This type of cultural and religious connection with the country of origin also has ecclesiological implications, diasporal communities being entitled to ask for and receive the spiritual assistance of their Mother Church. The pastoral care of the Mother Church is manifested in the establishment of the necessary ecclesial structures (parishes, archdioceses, dioceses and Metropolitan Sees), which, from an ecclesiastical point of view, amount in transforming diaspora communities into “places outside (*hyperorius*) the ecclesiastical borders of jurisdiction, [...] places of those of the same race even though they live outside the ethno-ecclesiastical borders of the national church.”<sup>31</sup> In this process, Orthodox Churches are not modifying their canonical territory or jurisdiction, but are engaging in spiritual and pastoral care for their communities, which constitutes an essential element of the mission of the Church.

30 Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity. Vol. I: The History and Canonical Structure of the Orthodox Church*, New York 2011, 300.

31 Grigorios D. Papatomas, *Ethno-phyletism and the (so-called) ecclesial “diaspora”*, in: *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57/3–4 (2013), 433.



#### 4.2 *Redefining Ecclesial Structures in Diaspora*

The global migrational dynamics set in motion a process of re-territorialisation of the mission of the Churches. Already in the first centuries of Church history, there were cases when bishops were appointed based on “ethnic jurisdiction” without a given territory like Theophilus, the “bishop of the Goths”, who took part at the First Ecumenical Council in 325, or the case of the “synods of Visigoths” in Spain.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the principle of the *monobishopric* – “one bishop in one city” (according to Canon 8 of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea 325) – the Holy and Great Council stipulates in the document “Orthodox Diaspora”, that according to the principle of *oikonomia* a new organisational structure can be activated until the canon can be strictly applied in the future (§ 1b). Yet, co-territoriality (the coexistence of multiple Churches on the same territory) is seen as a “deformation of Church”,<sup>33</sup> contradicting the canon 2 of the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople 381. In order to bend the potential negative effects of this structural mutation generated by the mission of the autocephalous Churches in the diaspora, a new institution, that of the Episcopal Assemblies, was called into being. The mission of these Assemblies is to offer a forum of discussion and practical solutions to the specific problems of the diaspora communities in the spirit of communion and in concordance with the tradition of the Church. The Holy and Great Council of Crete established thirteen regions around the globe where the Episcopal Assemblies will gather the various bishops of the diaspora communities which belong to the same canonical jurisdiction (§ 2a): Canada, United States of America, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, Great Britain and Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, Austria, Italy and Malta, Switzerland and Lichtenstein, Germany, Scandinavian countries (except Finland), Spain and Portugal.<sup>34</sup> The Episcopal Assembly has a Chairman, belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate or in his absence the next bishop in the order of diptychs, one or two Vice-Chairmen, an Executive Committee, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The main purposes of the Episcopal Assembly are to safeguard the unity of the Church, to maintain and cultivate the interconfessional and inter-religious dialogue on local level, the build-up bridges of trust and relations

32 Patriciu Dorin Vlaicu, *Autonomy and Orthodox Diaspora from the point of view of the documents adopted by The Holy and Great Council*, in: SUBBTO 1 (2017), 126.

33 Grigorios D. Papatomas, *Ethno-phyletism and the (so-called) ecclesial “diaspora”*, in: *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57/3–4 (2013), 437.

34 Document of the Holy and Great Council 2016, *The Orthodox Diaspora*, § 3, on <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/diaspora>, (1.2.2022).

with the local government and with society, to plan and coordinate common activities, and to elaborate a plan to establish diaspora on a canonical basis.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. Primacy and Authority

### 5.1 *Between Centralization of Authority and Synodal Communion*

The preparation as well as the meeting of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete revealed that the definition of primacy on a universal level doesn't have the same meaning for all Churches. The fact that the Churches of Antioch, Russia, Georgia and Bulgaria didn't participate to the Council for different reasons, even if they have participated at the preparatory meetings and even agreed on the documents to be discussed at and approved by the Council, raises the question of the authority of the primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. For this reason, during the Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, which was held just six months before the Council in January 2016 in Chambésy (Switzerland) His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church made a call to the need of renewing the normativity of the pan-Orthodox Synod as the synodal rule of the organisation of the Church on universal level through episcopal gatherings with representatives from all Orthodox Churches that will convene each five, seven or ten years.<sup>36</sup>

The debates on the relation between primacy and synodality are close to the themes discussed in the bilateral dialogues between Orthodox and Catholics and emerged soon after the publication of the bilateral document "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority", Ravenna, 2007.<sup>37</sup> In this regard, it is necessary to mention two reactions from the Orthodox context concerning this document.

The first one is the "Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the subject of primacy in the Universal Church", a synodal document of the Russian Orthodox

35 Ibidem, art. 4 and art. 5 of the Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora.

36 Address of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania, delivered in the opening of the Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, January 22, 2016, Chambésy, Switzerland, <https://pravoslavie.ru/89992.html> (15.2.2022).

37 For more details see <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html> (18.2.2022).

Church, which states from the outset that it does not agree with the sections of the Ravenna document dealing with synodality and universal primacy.<sup>38</sup> The reaction of the Moscow Patriarchate focuses on presenting the heterogeneity of the different types of conceiving the statute of primate of a local Church based on identifying the source of primacy. It distinguishes between three levels of primacy: first, an episcopal-local primacy, for which the source of the primacy is the apostolic succession; second, a regional level concerning Autocephalous Churches, for which the primacy has its source in the election of a primate by a regional synod; and third, a universal level, for which the primacy has its origin in the order of diptychs.<sup>39</sup> It should also be noted that the document refuses to reflect dogmatically on the universal primacy is characterised by polemical overtones in understanding the primacy of the bishop of Rome. This drew criticism from the catholic theologian Hyacinthe Destivelle, who lamented an incomplete theology of primacy in the Moscow reaction.<sup>40</sup>

The second one is the response of Metropolitan Elpidophoros Lambriniadis (b. 1967), professor of theology at University of Thessaloniki and current Metropolitan of America of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the position of the Moscow Patriarchate, related above. The article entitled “The First Without Equals: An Answer to the Text on the Primacy of the Moscow Patriarchate” presents some theological and canonical inaccuracies, starting with the title that names a type of primate that does not correspond to the Orthodox tradition and ethos, namely *primus sine paribus* (first without equals). Expressions like this raise suspicions about how the universal primacy becomes an imperfect copy of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Metropolitan Elpidophoros, following the ecclesiology of Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas of Pergamon (b. 1931), tries to provide a dogmatic foundation for the primacy using the analogy of the Holy Trinity, stressing the monarchy of the Father.<sup>41</sup> This analogy steps out of the Tradition of the Church, where the birth of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit were not understood hierarchically, but as a communion. Another problematic element in Metropolitan Elpidophoros’ article is the understanding of the Ecumenical Patriarch as the “ecumenical prelate”

38 Department for External Church Relation of Moscow Patriarchate <https://mospat.ru/en/2013/12/26/news96344/> (19.2.2022).

39 For more details see Amphiloichios Miltos, *Collégialité et Synodalité. Vers une Compréhension Commune entre Catholiques et Orthodoxes*, Paris 2019.

40 See Hyacinthe Destivelle, *Conduis-la vers l'Unité Parfaite. (Ecuménisme et Synodalité*, Paris 2018.

41 Metropolitan Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, *First without Equals: A Response to the Text on Primacy of the Moscow Patriarchate*, <https://www.ec-patr.org/arxeio/elp2014-01-en.pdf> (18.1.2022), 7.

or “universal hierarch”, which again generated the reaction of the Moscow Patriarchate through Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev (b. 1966), who contested the decision-making power of a universal primate in the face of an Ecumenical Council.<sup>42</sup>

The synodal way of governing of the Church and the synodality as a particular way of thinking the action in and of the Church is rather a ‘liturgical act’ of service and fraternal leadership according to the biblical principle “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:43–45). The synodality as a structure of organisation of the Church respects the principle of communion and avoids the tendency of imposing a pyramidal structure of power.<sup>43</sup> The primacy in this sense should not take the form of a supra-synodal authority, but is the expression of the synodal communion, in which the synod acts in complementarity with the primate, himself a part of the synod.

## 5.2 *Primacy and the Prerogatives of the Primate*

In order to understand the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the structure of Orthodox Church it is necessary to identify its prerogatives. They include: canonical dispositions or historical precedence that allow the Church of Constantinople to grant autocephaly; intervention in litigious disputes on universal level; and a primacy of honour. Yet these disclaims are not accepted by all Orthodox Churches.

From a canonical point of view, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has certain canonical privileges historically granted by the importance of the location of the patriarchal throne in the capital city of the Byzantine Empire. Concretely, the establishment of the principle of diptychs is expressed in the order of the Pentarchy (organisation of the Church in five ancient autocephalous Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). At the Third Ecumenical Council in Constantinople 431 (canon 3) and the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon 451 (canon 28) the Throne of Constantinople received a primacy and equality in honour with the bishop of Rome, remaining second in rank. This primacy of honour conferred to the

42 Metropolitan Ilarion Alfeyev, *Primacy and Synodality from an Orthodox Perspective*, Paper presented at St Vladimir’s Theological Seminary on 8 November 2014, <https://mospat.ru/fr/2014/11/09/news11091/> (10.2.2022).

43 John D. Zizioulas, *The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection*, in: *Jurist* 48/1 (1988), 378.

Ecumenical Patriarchate is exercised in the Orthodox Church, after the schism in 1054 under the paradigm *primus inter pares* (first among equals).

The prerogatives of the primate on a universal level in Orthodoxy are not always interpreted in the same way in the local Orthodox Churches. Therefore, the most problematic privilege of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is the granting of a Tomos of autocephaly. If the Patriarchate of Constantinople argues that this right belongs to the Church of Constantinople only, the Russian Orthodox Church holds this act to be a prerogative of the Mother Church (i.e., the Moscow Patriarchate would grant the autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine as part of its jurisdiction).<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to remember here that granting of the Tomos of autocephaly of a new Church is not the result of the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch, but is a decision of the synod of the Ecumenical Throne. In the case of the Church of Ukraine, the Ecumenical Patriarchate reclaimed its authority as the Mother Church of the people of Ukraine: “The Holy Mother and Great Church of Christ of Constantinople regards the Ukrainian nation and people as Her precious sons and daughters, born from the baptismal waters that flowed through the banks of the Dnieper River. From the days of our brilliant predecessor, Saint Photios the Great, the love of the Mother Church for the pious Christians of your lands has never abated.”<sup>45</sup>

Another right claimed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate after the schism in 1054, as in the interpretation of the Byzantine canonist Theodor Balsamon (1140–1199), concerns the privilege to take appeal as a last court in judging church discipline matters on universal level. This right was offered before the schism to the bishop of Rome by canon 3 of the Synod of Sardica 343.<sup>46</sup> The exercise of this prerogative in the granting of the autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine, provoked great opposition from the side of the Russian Orthodox Church in the episcopal rehabilitation of the “Patriarch of Kiev”, Filaret Denysenko, considered until then as a “schismatic”, defrocked and

44 Kallistos Ware, *Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church*, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10/1 (2019), 35.

45 Message By His All-Holiness to the Devout Ukrainian People on the occasion of the Triumphal Entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into the Holy City of Jerusalem on <https://hellighallvard.blogspot.com/2014/04/message-by-his-all-holiness-to-devout.html> (15.2.2022).

46 Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*, Los Angeles 2019, 49–50.

excommunicated in 1997 by Moscow Patriarchate and acknowledged by all the other local Churches.<sup>47</sup>

### 5.3 *Authority and Governing of the Church*

The very first form of authority expressed in the Church is represented by Christ, who is the Head of the Church, his Body. The authority in the Church has the main purpose to ensure the harmony and coexistence between opposed positions and avoid centripetal tendencies. The primate of the synod, as an image of authority that contributes to the cohesion of plurality of voices in the synod, can be the source of unity *ad personam* when his leadership reflects the spirit of fraternal love and the will of serving the unity of the synod. This organisational dimension of authority must therefore be completed by a spiritual dimension. The apostles received their authority from Christ, who sent them to preach and make disciples of all nations, but also from the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost. According to Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church authority is always related to the search for holiness. Moreover, holiness is the source of every authentic form of authority in the Church. This relation between holiness and authority has concrete consequences on the life, unity and communion of the Church: "Spiritual authority emerging from the holiness of life of all the people of God, not only of bishops and priests, through the exercise of humility and compassion, penitence and renewal, reconciliation and diaconal work in society, remains not only a complementary authority to the pastoral and magisterial authority but also a reminder that authentic authority is service for saving the communion with God and with one another, service or saving the unity of the church as the communion of the saints."<sup>48</sup>

The Orthodox Church associates authority with synodality, which becomes the organisational body of the Church on a regional level and expresses a communitarian structure of Church leadership, manifested by communion, fraternal love and consensus. In this sense, it is important to mention that the regional synodality, as well as the autocephaly of a Church are not only the result of historical and cultural movements but are related to the theological fundament of ecclesiology. In this sense Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, stresses that the "pneumatological dimension of ecclesiology necessitates a church structure combining unity and diversity at the same time. A

47 Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 17 October 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5515016.html> (17.2.2022).

48 Metropolitan Daniel Ciobotea, Holiness as Content and Purpose of Ecclesial Authority, in: Tamara Grdzeldze (ed.), *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, Geneva 2005, 91–96, here: 95.

universalist or pyramidal ecclesiology risks sacrificing diversity for the sake of unity. In a pneumatic ecclesiology the 'one and the many' exist independently, and this is impossible outside a canonical system in which synods at all levels complete and correct one another".<sup>49</sup> The regional synodality, as an image of unity in diversity, is interconnected with the need of the Church to adapt itself to cultural and historical realities, as further explained by Zizioulas: "The incarnational aspect of Christology leads to an ecclesiology which respects cultural and historical diversity. Our Lord assumed not simply human nature but a particular historical people with its cultural characteristics."<sup>50</sup> However, at the level of the local Church, the primate has a major importance in convening the synod, establishing the point of order and in validating, and ensuring the communion between the bishops, his presence being required for the election of a bishop, according to the 34 apostolic canon.

Another aspect of primacy is the eschatological reality of the Church. In this respect the Church does not enter the logic of secular authority. Consequently, all manifestations of power exercised by the primate, the bishop or any other type of ministry must be a kenotic act of service for the sake of the communion. This ministry of fraternal love, where the primate accepts to be the servant of all, is an evidence of self-renunciation that expresses the spirit of the authentic diakonia.<sup>51</sup> Authority becomes, therefore, the exercise of serving one another in humility and love, according to the model of Christ.

## 6. Conclusions

The unity of Orthodoxy, in current realities, is challenged by multiple ecclesiological factors especially concerning the status of the Church mission beyond the borders of a nation state and the exercise of authority and of autonomy. The global phenomenon of migration of Orthodox believers involves the emergence of new dynamics of mission, but also emphasises the tensions between the Churches who reclaim the pastoral care for their diaspora communities. The pastoral activity of the local Churches in diaspora is necessary not only for maintaining values such as the national or cultural identity but is itself an incarnational aspect of any theology of mission, which refers to respecting

49 John D. Zizioulas, *The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection*, in: *Juris* 48/1 (1988), 382.

50 *Ibidem*, 382.

51 Kallistos Ware, *Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church*, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10/1 (2019), 38.

the particularities of each ethnos. For the same reason, the autocephaly of a Church is a theological issue that concerns aspects of the pastoral care in a given cultural or ethnic framework. When the desire for more autonomy meets with the strive for unity, conflict may appear. Solving the disputes between different positions is the task of the synodal communion on regional and global level. The rapport between the primate and the synod must reflect the quest for unity in the spirit of the kenotic love for the others. The principle of the governance of the Church is therefore the practice of authority manifested in the personal search of holiness and fraternal action, through communion in synodal acts at every level of the Church. This practice of synodality may strengthen the affirmation of ecclesial autonomy together with the visible unity in communion.