

**The canonical structure, the ecclesiastical practice/implementation
and the ecclesiological hermeneutics of the synodality in the Patriarchate of Alexandria.**

1. The historical evolution of the practice of synodality: the origin of the contemporary practice, the circumstances, the justification and the consequences of the possible changes.

It is a common place ("topos") that "the life of the Church of Alexandria was the result of particular circumstances. It also had and lived historical adventures, like the other Churches in the East. Internally, it was threatened by Christological disputes and heresies. Externally, it had to face serious historical crises. Consequently, the conscience about the administration of the Church through a synod and the settlement of its general issues was numbed under and through some circumstances, but it did not die. "

The monocratic or totalitarian regime is foreign to the fundamental principles in the administration of the Orthodox Eastern Church. However, leaders-churchmen with monocratic-totalitarian tendencies existed in the Church of Alexandria, as it was the case for other Orthodox churches as well.

The synodal constitution, which is a basic characteristic of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Orthodox Eastern Church, was missing in the Presbyterian Church of St. Apostle and Evangelist Mark neither during the ancient nor in the later years.

In Antiquity, during the years of spiritual and material prosperity, the Church of Alexandria was governed in a synodal way, as the number of synods that have taken place witnesses it.

A new situation came upon during the period of the Arabic domination (639-1517), the period of the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. The Church fell into decline, the pastoral flock fell of, and proportionally speaking, the Hierarchy became inexistent. Nevertheless, the synodal institution was preserved in the consciousness of the administrators of the Church of Alexandria.

At the beginning of the 19th century, during the Ottoman domination, the Orthodox flock began to grow, fact that led to the election and nomination of more shepherds, thus the need to implement the synodal institution was waken.

As we are informed, already during the period of Patriarch Nicanora (1866-1869), the Church of Alexandria began to "find itself" and to pursue its internal reorganization on the basis of the traditions of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, the core of which is the synodal institution.

It is noteworthy that "on the Ottoman Empire, because of the political unity of Egypt with the other regions of the state, the Patriarchs of Alexandria were elected to Constantinople and lived there, they administered their little flock in Egypt from afar with the assistance of bishops whom they designated as patriarchal commissioners in Cairo and Alexandria ".

Thus, the atony that was presented in the synodal institution until the end of the 19th century, in no way meant its destruction.

The reorganization of the synodal institution into the Alexandrian Church in the 20th century began since Patriarch Photios (1900-1925) and was completed during the patriarchy of the "Great Patriarch" of Meletius II, where the regularity and the normal life took place.

This regularity has been preserved until our days and during the period of service of Patriarch Theodore II, with some small gaps in the middle years, but mainly during the last years of the time of Patriarch Christophoros II (1939-1967) – and that because of his long illness, the result is that the constitution of the Church of Alexandria remains in theory and in practice synodical and democratic.

2. The implementation of the regulations (frequency of the convocation of synods, actual participation, way of decision-making).

The Synodal Institution during the period of Patriarch Meletios (1926-1935)

When Patriarch Meletios II took over the destiny of the Patriarchate of Alexandria (1926-1935), he declared solemnly that he would govern the patriarchal throne in synod / a synodal way.

The statement - in terms of theory - had no reason to exist. Because - since there are Metropolitans with pastoral responsibilities -, it is self-evident from the canonical system of the Church that there will be also a Synod. However, in fact this is not the case, because several Metropolitans existed also during the time of Patriarch Photius, but the constitution of the Synod was an excellent act in the governing of the Church.

It was very aptly argued that "this statement aimed at putting into practice/implementation the canonical principle; this being a substantial change in the administration in the life of the Church of Alexandria."

The Patriarch of Alexandria Meletios, having previous experience in drafting relevant regulations, undertook the reorganization of the Alexandrian throne by statutes, which constituted the collection called "Regulations of the Patriarchate of Alexandria" (1935 edition).

One of these statutes is the "Patriarchal Constitution / Order in Synod related to the Synodal Institution" on which he supported the synodal institution for the administration of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Here, it should be noted that for the first time the function of the synod at the Patriarchate of Alexandria was defined and specified by written.

It should be noted that Patriarch Meletios had already applied from the first moment the synodal institution in 1926, when he convened twice a year the Metropolitans of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in synod, according to the 37 Canon of Apostles. When in the sixth year since the implementation of the synodal institution the Patriarchal Constitution / Order in Synod related to it was published, on November 1931, during the days of Patriarch Meletios, until then, 180 meetings of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria were held, during which many issues were resolved.

In the elaboration of this Patriarchal Order on the Synodal Institution, apart from Patriarch Meletios, Metropolitans participated in and co-signed, as members of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria Theophanis of Tripoli, Christoforos of Leontopolis, Nikolaos of Ermoupolis, Parthenios of Ptolemaida, Nicholas of Axomi, Isidoros of Ioannopoli and Arsenios of Nouvia.

Therefore, after the five-year implementation of the institution, Patriarch Meletios, referring to its definitive establishment, defined the following canonical bases of the Institution of the Patriarchal Synod:

1. The Holy Synod consists of the Patriarch as the head and the Metropolitans of the Patriarchal group as members connected to an Organic body. (34 Canon of apostles, XVI of the first, XVI and XIX of Antioch)
2. For the composition of the Synod must be present - "in any case" *εξάπαντος* (this is the expression of the Canon 19 of Antioch) – the Patriarch; Assembly of the Archpriests without the Prime (Protos) doesn't consist a Synod (XX Canon of Antioch)
3. The Patriarch is obliged to invite the Metropolitans to a Synod, and they are required to come, twice or once a year (according to some Canons: Canon 37 of Apostles, V of the first, XIX of the fourth, VIII of the sixth, VI of the seventh, XX of Antioch, XL of Laodicia and Carthagene XXVI, LX, LXI, LXXXI, LXXXIV, LXXXV, CIV), but it is not required to demand in the one-year Synod the presence of all – only if there is an absolute necessity - so as not to "crush the brothers" (Carthagene V). There can also participate Bishops of other Patriarchates or orthodox Churches, but never uninvited (II of the second).
4. In serious cases, the majority of the Metropolitans must be co-deputies or jointly responsible with the Patriarch on voting (Canon 19)
5. The synodal decision is understood as the unanimity of the Head and the Members (34 Canon of Apostles), or as the unanimity of the Prime and the majority of the Members (Canon 19).

On the basis of these canonical and fundamental principles, the new Synodal System of the Patriarchate of Alexandria is defined by the "Patriarchal Order in Synod for Synodal Institution" of the 13th of November 1931.

According to what the Patriarchal Order assigns in 34 articles, the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, having the privileges and rights recognized in him by the holy rules and act / praxis of the Church, ministers the Church on the basis of the divine and holy canons, the canonical orders and the orders and decisions taken at the Synod (Article 1).

It is composed of all the Metropolitans of the throne of Alexandria, without exception, under the presidency of the Patriarch (article 2).

On the article 3, it is stated that "the assembly of Metropolitans in vacancy of the throne is deprived of the privileges of the perfect Synod, due to the lack of the Head of the throne. It defines her work exclusively in the election of a new Patriarch, without any other competence.

The work of the Synod, as this is presented in the article 5, is administrative, normative and judicial, and its jurisdiction is defined by the holy canons.

The Synod of the Hierarchy is held twice a year and extraordinarily, as often as necessary (Article 6). Today, however, because of the distance of the dioceses of the Patriarchate from the center and their dispersion in all over the African continent, it normally meets once a year, every autumn and extraordinarily, if and when there are reasons for convocation. To this it should be added that provincial bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria participate as well - institution that appeared in 1997, in time of the Patriarch Pierre VII, and they have the right to participate in and intervene in all the manifestations of the meetings of the Synod without the right of vote.

The Article 7 refers to the place of the convocation of the Synod: it says characteristically that "the convocation is held wherever the Patriarch appoints". Wherever the Patriarch designates, means whether in Cairo or in Alexandria.

The synodal work is not only the right of the Metropolitan, but mostly the duty and the obligation of each bishop. However, the Metropolitans of the provinces outside Egypt can be exempted from the synodal obligation, in order not to charge the Patriarchal Fund with huge travel expenses and especially when it is twice a year. But this exemption cannot exceed the three years (Article 8).

The beginning of each Synod is announced by the Patriarch (article 10). The further details of the quorum and the decision-making are defined. The quorum of the Synod is described in the Articles 11 and 12, where it is underlined that the decisions are taken by majority.

The Articles 13 to 19 are referred to the internal functioning of the body of the Holy Synod, to procedural issues of the Synod, and the protocol (agenda, meeting "within closed doors", dress-code, way of sitting, who runs the work, who keeps order, who takes note of the tractanda's discussion of each synod, their validity, the functions of secretary of the Synod, etc.).

The election of the Archpriests/Bishops, the approval of the Budget and the approval of the Patriarchate's and Metropolitan's Reports, matters of economic and administrative nature as well, concerning the general functioning of the Patriarchate as an organization and institution, come under its governing from the Synod that functions under the Patriarch (Articles 20 and 21). So, on the articles 20-25 the following main and fundamental dispositions are written. Under the administrative authority of the patriarch in Synod come all administrative issues that are outside the limits of each one of the prelatric jurisdiction. The main of them are the election of the Archpriests, the approval of the budget and the approval of the Patriarchate's and Metropolitan's Reports, the supreme control of all ecclesiastical administrations, the decision to expropriate an ecclesiastical estate in order to replace it with another, more profitable, the arrangement of a loan on the detriment of the Throne, the resignation from a monetary or real estate claim, the settlement of differences between the Patriarch and the Metropolitan, or between Metropolitans, etc.

The normative authority of the Patriarch in Synod includes the "Patriarchal Orders in Synod" with which are regulated the following: the election of the Patriarch and the Metropolitans, the functions of the clergy and their remuneration, the management of sacred properties, the education, the

rehabilitation and the promotion of the Church officers/ministers, the rise or fall of the Metropolitan Thrones, the constitution and the procedure of the ecclesiastical courts, the administration of the foundations of the Church of Teachers and Charities, the relations with other religions. These are defined in terms of its regulatory jurisdiction of the Holy Synod over the Patriarch or rather in terms of its regulatory jurisdiction of "the Patriarch in Synod".

The Articles 26 to 33 are referred to issues of judicial nature related to the Synod. Furthermore, the Order defines in detail the functioning of the Synod as a judicial body.

In particular: The Synod in its judicial capacity acts a) as a Court of Appeal, b) as a Criminal Court and c) as a Review Court.

It is noteworthy that the 31st article, according to which "the admission of the accused's guilt is sufficient for the judgment under the Apostolic Canon LXXIV, makes investigation and testimonies unnecessary, and is considered as a relieving reason during the imputation".

3. The Relations between Church and State and the work of the synod

The Patriarchate of Alexandria has its headquarters in the state of Egypt, whose citizens in the overwhelming majority are Muslim and the official religion of the state is Islam, but although the State (Egypt) is a different religion, the Constitution of the country establishes the religious tolerance for the traditional religious expressions of the Egyptian people, namely Islam and Christianity. Indeed, for the Patriarchate of Alexandria in accordance with the Egyptian Constitution and Law 26/1975, the state does not interfere with the internal affairs of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and takes care only for its security. He also recognizes the Patriarch as the supreme leader and attributes to him the Egyptian nationality.

Also, in the synodal work of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, no other Christian communities are involved, neither as guests nor as observers. Here, it should be noted that the Patriarchate maintains excellent relations with the Coptic Church of Egypt and with the existing Uniates Christian religious communities living in the state of Egypt.

4. The role of synodality on multiple levels

Apart from the above and beyond the level of the local Church, the question arises: How is the local synodality (diocese / province, region / district, Autocephalous Church) related to interecclesial and universal synodality?

The synodal institution is evangelical and apostolic since its birth. It was formulated by the Ecumenical and Local Synods, preserved in the tradition of the Church, and remains a trait of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Eastern Church in all aspects of its life.

These were confirmed at the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church in Crete in June 2016. Finally, as regards the role and responsibility of the Prime in the practice and in the theology of synodality, we must emphasize that it ensures the regular functioning of both; Regulation and Synod. In conclusion, the regulation of the Church of Alexandria continues and faithfully reflects the ancient synodal tradition of the Church, as it was delivered over the centuries, especially in the first millennium.