



Adrian Niculcea

Primacy or Sinodality? An Intra-orthodox Argument following the Ravenna Papers (2007) ¹

Abstract

The life of Orthodox Churches today is troubled by an unexpected and unusual problem: an ambition of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to establish an Orthodox primacy, following the model of the papal primacy in the Catholic world. This provoked a fierce reaction of the Russian Church, which not only walked out the Catholic-Orthodox Mixed Commission for Theological Dialogue in Ravenna in 2007 and rejected its con-



Rev. Prof. Dr. Adrian Niculcea is Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University Ovidius of Constanța, Romania

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cluding document, but also refused to participate in the recent Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in Crete, alongside the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its supporting Churches. Both the ambition of Patriarch Bartholomew and the intense reaction of the Russian Church instigated a split in the Orthodox world detrimental to the notion of Orthodox unity and its message in the contemporary world. The situation is worsened by the nature of the issue, which is not simply canonical, but entails dogmatic and even ecclesiological implications. For this reason, the studies discussing the relation between ‘synodality’ and ‘primacy’ are particularly relevant today.

Keywords

Ravenna, Sinodality, Primacy, Orthodox Theology, Holy Synod

1 Introduction

An in-depth theological discussion concerning the notions of primacy and ‘synodality’ is more relevant today than ever. For the first time, the Orthodox world is faced with a dispute between the Patriarchates. The Russian Church holds a different position to that of the Ecumenical Patriarchy following the latter’s stance during the reunion of the International Mixed Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church held in Ravenna, 2007. Not only did the Russian Patriarchy refused the resulting conclusions of this meeting, summarised as the Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority, but they have also physically left the meeting in protest. This escalated seven years later in 2013 when the Russian Patriarchy formulated its reply to the Ravenna Commission Conclusions, entitled The position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the prob-

lem of primacy in the universal Church. Contained within was a firm rejection of the idea of “universal primacy.” In reply, the Ecumenical Patriarchy as a signatory of the “Ravenna document” communicated its Response to the Text on Primacy of the Moscow Patriarchate, in which the concept is defended by Elpidophoros, of Bursa.

At the core of the dispute lies the different interpretation of the notion of “universal primacy”. The Russian Patriarchy’s document states that this “universal primacy” is purely an “honorary” title given to the Patriarch of Constantinople by ecumenical synods, like this grounded in the accord given by the rest of the patriarchs. Delineated by this classical orthodox vision, the (pan-orthodox) “synod” and not the primacy of Constantinople, is the highest ecclesiastical authority of settling all orthodox issues. The Ecumenical Patriarchy rejects this point of view and claims that, on the contrary, the “synod” is subordinated to the “primacy” and as such, given that the Patriarch Bartholomew is the occupant of the first “chair” in Orthodoxy, he should be named “ecumenical hierarch” or “universal primacy” and given all rights and privileges associated with this title.

Such a fierce disagreement also occurred in 1923 when some of the Orthodox Patriarchies switched to the Gregorian calendar. However, at its conclusion, there was no break in communion between the arguing sides and the compromise reached at that point is still upheld to this day. The dispute at that point were not theological in nature but were merely a disagreement regarding the calendar, simply involving a ritual, historic tradition. This time, the arguments are of a profound theological nature, similar (if not identical) to those existent during the unionist councils held in the Byzantine Empire which divided the religious world in Constantinople in latinophrones and anti-Latins. The fact that the same seems to be happening now in the Orthodox world offers an interesting perspective on the issue.

The refusal of the Russian, Bulgarian and Georgian Patriarchies to participate at the Great and Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, recently held in Chania, Crete may not be directly linked to what happened in Ravenna but it is a consequence of that event.

This estrangement of the Russian Church, lasting more than ten years, may not be a separation per se of the Russian Church from the rest of the Orthodox Churches, but if this theological dispute is not resolved soon, it may well become one. That is why the involvement of the dogmatists of all Orthodox nations in a united, sustained effort to settle the issue of the true significance of the notions of “primacy” and “synodality”, as well as of the legitimate relationship between these notions is urgent. The following study is but a mere attempt at doing exactly that.

1 The Origins and true Significance of the Notion of “Primate”

1.1 The Ecumenical Patriarchy’s view on “universal primacy”

In his attempt to fight the “Russian standpoint”, which contests the idea of the existence of an “ecumenical hierarchy”, Elpidophoros elaborated his argument titled “Primus inter pares or Primus inter paribus?”. In his response, the general point of view of the Ecumenical Patriarchy on the notion of “primacy” is presented, with particular emphasis on that of “universal primacy”. The argument is structured in two separate stages. In the first one, the Metropolitan of Bursa invokes the 3rd canon of the 2nd Ecumenical Synod, the 28th canon of the 4th Ecumenical Synod and the 36th canon of the Quinisext Synod which established the diptychs, or taxis meaning the hierarchization of the patriarchies of the Orthodox world. These synods have confirmed that the Patriarchy of Constantinople is the first

of the patriarchies, followed by Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow and so on.

“Not all local churches are equal in regards to their order and value. ...This means that the bishops are organized depending on the Church which was assigned to them...In such a hierarchy, it is inconceivable not to have a protos (of the Universal Church).”

In other words, not only are the “chairs” unequal in value but so are the personages occupying them. The existence of a “universal protos” is not only based on the canons above, but it is also functionally defined: the protos is the element that offers unity to the bishops and even to the Church itself:

“...the protos is the constituent element and the keeper of the many.”

The general implication of this argument is apparent - the only one that can unite the bishops of a country, dispersed in their bishoprics as well as those bishops gathered in the synod, meaning “the many”, is “the protos”. This specific suggestion, coherently synced with the general one, is that the only one who can unite all the Orthodox bishops is not a pan-Orthodox synod per se, but only a universal protos, the Ecumenical Patriarch. Accordingly, the synod is dependent on the will of the Ecumenical Patriarch, becoming nothing else than the expression in potentia of that unity of bishops that is expressed in actum in the person of the Ecumenical Patriarch. These assertions made by the Metropolitan are surprising, to say the least, but they do make sense when their true “source” of inspiration is located.

1.2 The inspiration sources of the notions of “universal primacy” and its real significance

The immediate source of his ideas is, as expected the “document of Ravenna” which is relegated almost in its entirety to defining the notions of “synodality” and “authority”. In paragraphs 4, 40, 39 and 43, the document states that the notion of “synodality” is the expression of the diversity of the local

Churches represented by their bishops, while the “authority” exercised by the “primate” over those bishops would, in fact, aim to maintain the unity of the Church itself. The true inspiration for this definition of the two notions within the “Ravenna document” is the 2nd Council of Vatican, which defines the bishopric primacy within the eparchy and the universal primacy of the Pope within the Catholic Church.

“Each bishop (as primate of his eparchy) represents the perpetual, visible principal and foundation of unity within his particular church. (...) The Roman Pontiff, as a descendent of Peter, (and as such a universal primate) is the perpetual, visible principal and foundation of the unity of both bishops as well as believers. (...) As such, each bishop represents his Church and all together with the Pope represent the Church in its entirety in the bond of peace, love, and unity” (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

It is worth noticing the similarity between the Metropolitan’s assertions where “the primate is the constituent element and keeper of the unity of the many” and what is stated in *Lumen Gentium*, 23, where “the Roman Pontiff...is the principal...unity...of the many”. These Catholic “sources” can also be identified when talking about the “source of the primacy” which as he states is the “person” of the primate himself and who exercises his authority directly and not by delegation received from the synod.

“The bishops, as descendants of the apostles, exercise the whole power that the office holds (*potestatis ordinaria*) per se in their dioceses” (*Christus Dominus*, 8)².

The same idea is also present in the assertion that:

² Applying this concept to a bishop reiterates the rejection of the protestant concept of community delegation: a bishop’s authority stems from himself, and not through a mandate of the community he serves. The same idea is highlighted regarding the Pope. He has authority through himself and not through a mandate of the Universal Church.

“(The Roman Pontiff’s) definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable (Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese non autem ex consensu ecclesiae irreformabilis est)” (Lumen Gentium, 25).

Thus, these are the “sources” of the latinophrone theologians around the Ecumenical Patriarch, and they are not Orthodox but purely Catholic. The real issue however of the notion of “primate” used by Elpidophoros in his work is not necessarily the Catholic background of his thinking, but the Catholic meaning of the notion and its ecclesiological consequences which are in profound contradiction with the Orthodox view on the matter. This is something the bishop of Fanar seems to be unaware of.

One should start by looking at the idea above according to which:

“each bishop represents his Church, and all together with the Pope represent the Church in its entirety” (Lumen Gentium, 23).

This way of representation will quickly lead to the idea that the bishops and the Pope can act “in the name of all the people” even in matters of liturgical and sacramental nature:

“The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people” (Lumen Gentium, 10).

The notion the he “makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice...in the name of all the people” must be understood in its literal, concrete meaning as in another document this turns into a celebration “in the absence of all the people”, meaning a private mass:

“In the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, (...) the daily celebration of Mass is strongly urged, since even if there cannot be present a number of the faithful, it is still an act of Christ and the Church.” (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 13).

This possibility to celebrate Mass in the absence of the faithful, the so-called private mass, is in total coherence with the idea proclaimed at Ravenna according to which “synodality”

“also involves all the members of the community in obedience to the bishop, who is the protos and head of the local Church” (Paragraph 20) and as such “The bishops’ decisions have to be received in the life of the Churches, especially in their liturgical life” (Paragraph 38).

The quotes clearly suggest that the bishops can make decisions without the consent of the people and even in their absence, in the same way, they can celebrate mass without them. This status of “bishopric” decisions is clearly seen in the case of the Popes decisions which are infallible by themselves without the consent of the Church. (*ex sese non ex consensus ecclesiae*), actually meaning in the absence of the Church.

Another consequence lies in the assertion that the ontological and hristological condition of the bishops is above that of the people.

“they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood” (*Lumen Gentium*, 10).

Defining the difference between the bishops and the people of God in ontological terms (“in essence and not only in degree”) will eventually lead to a conciliatory form of thinking in which the hierarchical priesthood itself suffers a “transubstantiation” of its condition, similar in nature to the “transubstantiation” of the Eucharistic elements:

“To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, “the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross”, but especially under the Eucharistic species” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*).

Based on this “transformation” of the bishops in “the One that we all receive”, the bishops and to the highest degree the Pope, come to believe that they are “acting in persona Christi” and

“take the place of Christ”, and even that each one of them becomes an “alter Christus”.

“the partaking of the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume” (Lumen Gentium, 26)³; „by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred, and the sacred character so impressed, that bishops eminently and visibly sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd, and High Priest, and that they act in His person” (Lumen Gentium, 21)⁴.

The parallel formed between the presence of Christ which is “conferred to the priests (or bishops)” and the presence of the same Christ “in the Eucharist elements” suggests that in its very essence, the Roman-Catholic thinking seems to believe that the priests, bishops and especially popes are nothing but “incidents” in time and space of the Body of Christ, very much the same as are the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist. Alongside the “real (Eucharistic) presence” of Christ we would also have “a real (Sacerdotal)” presence of the same Christ in the Church in the form of the Catholic Hierarchy! This way of understanding the status of the bishop, but most importantly that of the Pope explains the claim to the divine attribute of “infallible” (an attribute pertaining only to Christ as God), as well as the power

³ This text is a quote from Leo the Great (Serm. 63, 7; PL 54, 357C).

⁴ With regard to the expression ‘alter Christus’ here is the interpretation of Pope Benedict XVI: As an alter Christus, the priest is profoundly united to the Word of the Father who, in becoming incarnate took the form of a servant, he became a servant (Phil 2: 5-11). The priest is a servant of Christ, in the sense that his existence, configured to Christ ontologically, acquires an essentially relational character: he is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ, at the service of humankind. Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation, their happiness and their authentic liberation, developing, in this gradual assumption of Christ's will, in prayer, in “being heart to heart” with him. Therefore this is the indispensable condition for every proclamation, which entails participation in the sacramental offering of the Eucharist and docile obedience to the Church.” (June 2009) (<http://www.catholicforum.com/forums/showthread.php?35990-In-persona-Christi-or-Alter-Christus>).

exercised by the Popes in the Middle Ages - a veritable "Papal theocracy" which in reality concealed the desire of the Catholic Church to rule medieval states and the political world in its entirety.

By placing the "presence of Christ" which is conferred to the priest who celebrates Mass, to that of the "presence of the same Christ" in the Eucharistic gifts - a tendency present in Catholicism long before the 2nd Council of Vatican - has caused a great deal of concern in the Orthodox world for a long time. The Orthodox theologians were concerned that by conferring to the pope during the 1st Council of Vatican the attribute of "infallible", (an attribute which can only pertain to God which is the eternal being of Christ) it may lead to something that at the time was known as "pope-latria"⁵, a veritable "cult of the Pope" given that the Pope acts within the Church as a "vicar" or "replacement" of Christ.

Even if the Roman-Catholic theology of the time has wisely avoided declaring such a consequence, the way it understands today the acting "in persona Christi" of bishops but most importantly of the Pope, inevitably leads to the idea that the members of the Catholic hierarchy facilitate the presence of Christ through themselves alongside the presence of the same Christ in the Eucharistic elements. These are two of the gravest consequences that the notion of "primate" implies, a notion used by the theologians of Fanar as source of inspiration but of which consequences they seem to be unaware of when they proclaim the right of the Ecumenical Patriarch to such a privilege. To sum it up, Christ gathers in Himself the whole of humanity. Based on the ontological and progressive identification of the Catholic hierarchy with Christ, the bishop himself has

⁵ See T.M. Popescu, 'The Encyclical of Orthodox Patriarchs in 1848', Bucharest, 'The Romanian Orthodox Church', 1935, nr 11-12, p 71, n. 1

come to believe that he is also gathering in his own being the eparchy that he rules and that the Pope, as one in which the ontological identification with Christ represents a peak within the Church, comes to consider himself the bearer of the whole Catholic Church. This is the main reasoning behind the idea that the “primate” in the Church represents the unity of “the many” – the Catholic priest considers himself “primate” and principal of unity within his parish, the Catholic bishop sees himself as “primate” and principal of unity in his eparchy and the Pope proclaims himself without hesitation “primate” and principal of the unity of the whole Church. By ontologically identifying themselves with Christ, the members of the Catholic hierarchy proclaim themselves – each at the level of the fold they lead – as an intrinsic source of ecclesiastical power. As such, the entire dogmatic, canonical and even cultic authority is exercised by each member of this hierarchy with the conviction of an authority that they hold *per se* (in the case of bishops) or *ex sese* (in the case of the Pope). The direct consequence of this identification with Christ is that the bishop proclaims the faith without needing the assent of the people and the Pope can dogmatize infallibly without even needing the consent of the whole Church (*ex sese non ex consensus ecclesiae*). Moreover, to make things worse, the possibility of exercising the ecclesiastical power is not limited to dogmas or canons, but also extends to liturgical acts that can be operated by the same hierarchy without even the presence of the people (in the case of private masses). This is the true source of the notions of “primate” to which the present Ecumenical Patriarch and the theologians around him aspire.

These specific consequences reached by Roman – Catholic Ecclesiology reached are not mere contingencies, but, as I will attempt to prove in the third part of this study, they are the result of the Filioque triadology.

2 The Origins and true Significance of the Notion of “Synodality”

2.1 The views of the Metropolitan of Bursa (and of the Ecumenical Patriarchy) on the nature of “synodality”

I have so far tried to identify the real source and true meaning of the concept of “primate”, which the theologians of the Ecumenical Patriarchy use in their critique of the aforementioned Russian document and it is now time to move on to the second notion involved in this discussion, that of “synod” or “synodality”. Based on the 34th Apostolic canon and the 9th Antioch canon, which establishes that every bishop has to recognise the authority of the bishop of the capital as “protos” and “head”, but most importantly that of canon 16th Antioch, the Metropolitan of Bursa claims that any synod that is not presided by the protos (i.e. bishop of the capital) is incomplete:

“a complete synod (τελεία σύνοδος) is (only) that where the bishop of the capital is present.” (Canon 16 Antioch).

These sort of reasoning and the invoked canons are meant to support the insufficiency of synodality as a basis of the unity of the Church in the absence of a “primate” as its head.

There is, therefore, a necessity to have a canonical and biblical analysis of this notion of “synodality” as similar to that developed in the first part of this study on the notion of “primate”.

2.2 The real significance of the notion of “synodality” and its ecclesiological consequences.

A first observation: The use of 34th Apostolic Canon and 9th and 16th Antioch Canons does not offer a basis for that notion of “primate” that Metropolitan Elpidophoros believes to be superior to the notion of “synodality”. The obligation of all bishops to “never do anything too important without the prior knowledge of the capital’s bishop” is clearly motivated in the 9th Antioch Canon as in the capital “all those with business to settle

are assembled". It is obvious that "business" implies audiences to the emperor or other officials who could not have been for insignificant reasons and needed a certain hierarchization. It is exactly this order of the audience requests that could only be insured if the capital's bishop, which had to establish in an ad-hoc synod whether these requests could be addressed by other means or by an audience to the imperial authorities. In any case, the called-upon canons refer to civil "business" and not religious ones. This is the reason why the bishop's presence at synods was mandatory. Such a synod was constituted precisely by those who came from the provinces to settle their "affairs", which meant "problems" of all sorts and which could only be settled by the political authority of the time. As such, it was only natural that such a synod was held only in the presence of the "capital's bishop" who knew best the political intricacies of the imperial court.

Regarding ecclesiastical affairs, however, things were completely different. These were no longer conditioned by the "primate of the capital", who did not have any competence in such matters anyway, but were dependent on the synod itself which assembled all bishops as equals. This is exactly what the 37th Apostolic Synod states and which deals directly with matters of dogmatic and canonical nature:

"Twice a year the bishops' synod shall be held and together analyze the dogmas of the true faith (τὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβίας) and decide on ecclesiastical controversies (τὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβίας) that may arise: once in the 4th week of the Pentecost, and second on the 12th day of October." (37th Apostolic Canon).

However, also in the 5th Canon of the 1st Ecumenical Synod (325):

"Concerning those, whether of the clergy or of the laity, who have been excommunicated in the several provinces, let the provision of the canon be observed by the bishops which provide that persons cast out by some, be not readmitted by others. Nevertheless, the in-

quiry should be made whether they have been excommunicated by captiousness, or contentiousness, or any such like ungracious disposition in the bishop. And, that this matter may have due investigation, it is decreed that in every province synods shall be held twice a year, in order that when all the bishops of the province are assembled together, such questions may by them be thoroughly examined, that so those who have confessedly offended against their bishop, may be seen by all to be for just cause excommunicated, until it shall seem fit to a general meeting of the bishops to pronounce a milder sentence upon them" (5th Canon of the 1st Ecumenical Synod).

The two canons clearly show that the supreme authority regarding dogmas ("dogmas of the faith"), in issues related to matters of canonical jurisdiction ("ecclesiastical controversies") but also in disciplinary issues ("concerning those who have been excommunicated") is represented by the "assembled bishops". There is no trace of a distinct role given to the "primate", whether national or ecumenical, in what concerns the seeking of solutions to fundamental issues which may affect the essence of the Church itself. This means that if there is a supreme authority with the purpose of solving all authentic ecclesiastical issues and thus insure the "unity of the Church", this is either a regional, national or pan-orthodox synod, depending on the level of the debate. In the first millennium up to the Great Schism, this supreme authority was the Ecumenical Synods and not the "primates" of Rome or those of Constantinople, as the document of Ravenna or the Metropolitan of Bursa suggests.

A second observation: The same qualification of the synod as a supreme authority in solving any problems that generate "controversies" and threaten the "unity of the Church" is found in the New Testament. It is, of course, the famous "synod" of Jerusalem described in the Deeds of the Apostles (XV). The chapter describes how in Antioch a "controversy and even a fight of ideas (στάσεως και ζητήσεως ούκ όλίγησ)" erupted on the issue of the obligation of pagans to circumcise before the baptism.

This obligation was supported by converted Jews but contested by the followers of Paul. As the matter could not be settled locally, the Antioch Church decided to send some representatives to Jerusalem and raise the issue to the “apostles and priests” there. Faced with such a situation, “the apostles and the priests (and all the brothers, meaning all lay people) gathered there” and began to debate. At the end of the debates, “the apostles, priests and the whole Church (meaning the entire assembly of brothers) decided”. We can clearly see that the issue of the mandatory circumcision of pagans before baptism was raised by those in Antioch not to be settled by Peter, nor Jacob as “forefathers” of the Church of Jerusalem, but before the “assembled apostles” which reunited the whole Church there (i.e. “the apostles, priests and all brothers”) (v.22-23). Chapter XV of the Deeds of the Apostles irrefutably states that the supreme authority before which all matters and controversies of ecclesiastical nature, similar to those raised in Antioch, was not the “primate” of Jerusalem (exercised by either Peter or Jacob) but by the “assembled Church of Jerusalem”. This is thus the origin of the call to the “synodality of the Church” to settle the “ecclesiastical controversies” stated by the 37th Apostolic Canon and the 5th Canon of the 1st Ecumenical Council.

The ambition of Patriarch Bartholomew to a “universal primate”, supported by the theologians around him, is thus rooted in the Roman Catholic doctrine of “Peter’s primate”. According to the Catholic Church, Peter was a sort of a super-apostle whose jurisdiction extended over the entire Christian Church, thus possessing a universal jurisdiction. It is the essential thesis of the “Peter primate” inherited by the “papal primate” - as Peter’s jurisdiction extended over all the other apostles, so does the Pope’s over all the rest of the bishops of the Catholic Church. This is the “primacy” interpretation of Peter’s apostolate supported by the Catholic Church.

The biblical interpretation of the matter, however, is of a different nature. To support this statement, I will use a counter-argument rarely utilized against the “Peter primate” – the words of Jesus Christ:

“Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, *you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel!*” (Matthew, 19.27-28).

The words of the apostle dispel any interpretation of a “primate” in regards to Peter’s position amongst the apostles: each of the twelve apostles shall sit “on his chair” and will judge the tribe from which he comes from and which he was chosen to evangelize. Even if Christ’s words ignore the historic reality of the time when the old tribes from Moses’s time and those of the “apostles” sent to search the Canaan were long extinct (refer to Numbers XIII, 1-3), the essential idea is that Peter was not allocated a special position to judge all other tribes but only his own. His power to “bind and loosen” conferred upon him by Christ Himself did not thus extend over “all the tribes” but only over “one of the twelve”. The correlation between “the twelve tribes of Israel” and “the twelve apostles of Jesus” is more unequivocal. This means that Peter participated in the Jerusalem Synod not as a “primate of the apostles” but as an “apostle” like all the rest. He stood not on the first of the “chairs” but on “one of the twelve chairs”, i.e., on the chair of the tribe allocated to him and metaphorically by Christ Himself. It is a strong biblical argument that clearly contradicts the notion of a “universal primate” that the Pope claims to have and which the Ecumenical Patriarch also aspires to hold.

All these texts converge towards the idea that the apostles and their descendants, the bishops, cannot exist as ecclesiastical

realities “in themselves” (“per se” or “ex sese”), but only “in relation with” the people of God. This means that under no circumstance the bishop can substitute the people of God. The bishop is fundamentally an element of the liturgical congregation, acting only as a part, i.e. “in the presence” of the people. His statute of “envoy (apostolos)” to the people of God maintains him though in direct “relation” not only during the liturgical mass but also when he dogmatizes and formulates canons. However, the most important consequence of this consideration is that the Orthodox bishop, a faithful follower of the apostles, cannot elude the sacramental equality he holds about all the rest of the bishops in matters of dogma, and even less so in judicial and canonical matters. No bishop can become a “primate” about the rest in a sense given by the Roman Catholic theology. His apostolic character, i.e., that of an “envoy”, forces him to be “in relation” to the people of his eparchy. No one “sent” Peter to the rest of the apostles, but only to “the people of God”, to the “nations”. Similarly, no bishop as a follower of the same apostles can be an “envoy” to the rest of the bishops, but only to the “people of God”. The ad quem term of the “envoy” of each bishop is represented by the ordained faithful and not the other bishops. If there ever were an “envoy” to all the rest of the bishops, as the Pope in the Catholic Church claims to be, there should also be a special “service, ritual”, an ordination specific to the “primate”, distinct from that held for the rest of the bishops. Such a “ritual/service” though, does not exist in any of the books or texts conveyed to us through the times.

To sum up, both the canons of Holy Fathers’ Synods as well as the biblical reality of the New Testament clearly show that the purpose of the apostles, of the bishops and the priests was not to separate themselves from the “people of God”, of the Church’s lay congregation (“brothers” as they were called in Acts 15. Their goal was on the contrary to exercise their power

with which they were invested to form a relationship with the people. The Orthodox Bishopric is thus “fundamentally” in a relationship with “the people of God” not different from it in ‘essence’. That is why within the Orthodox world, private Masses are considered not only a liturgical heresy but also a dogmatic one. Not even the act of dogmatisation is allowed within Synods in the absence of “the people of God” as, after each such act, a formal “reception” of it is required to be made by the lay congregation. Moreover, while this “reception” process is no longer very visible today within the Orthodox world, it is nonetheless fundamental as its basis represents the “reception” of the brothers of the apostolic decisions taken at the great apostolic assembly held in Jerusalem during St. Peter’s time (Deeds XV, 2,4,6,12, 22-23). The Catholic Bishopric, which is one of distinct ontological/essentialist nature from the mass of “people of God”, can generate a “primacy” and dispense with the people’s accord. The Orthodox world emphasizes a relational, personalist bishopric, in which private masses are not allowed and in which any decisions taken by the bishopric without the accord of the people will also not be dogmatically and canonically permitted. This is why the notion of “primacy” is completely alien to the Orthodox tradition.

These specifically Orthodox ecclesiological notes, emphasized so far are themselves direct consequences of the monopatristic triadology and not mere contingencies within the sacramental-canonical Orthodox thinking.

3 The Communion of the Trinitarian Persons – the Supreme ecclesiological Model

3.1 The Metropolitan of Bursa and the Trinitarian Foundation of Ecclesiology

The most persuasive argument used to justify the aspirations of the current Ecumenical Patriarch to “primacy” is based on the

notion of “the Father’s Monarchy”. Referring to the Russian document, he states:

“For a deeper understanding of these innovative views of the Moscow Patriarchy, let us see the consequences these would have, were they applied in the life of the Holy Trinity, which is the real inspiration of any primacy(...). The Church has always understood the Father as being the first (“the Father’s Monarchy”) regarding His relationship with the other persons of the Holy Trinity. If we are to follow this innovative view held by the Moscow Patriarchy, then we should conclude that God the Father is not the cause without beginning of Godhead and Paternity (...), but the receiver of its Own “primacy”. However, where does He get it then? From the other persons of the Holy Trinity? How can we fathom such a thing without canceling the theological order, as it has been written by Gregory of Nyssa, or worse, without overturning or better put “mixing”, the relations between the persons of the Holy Trinity? Can the Son or the Holy Spirit precede the Father?”

The suggestion of this statement is quite clear. As the Father based on His “monarchy” is the One who gives life to the Son and the Holy Spirit and thus establishes an “order of theology” (wherein the Son is the second and the Holy Spirit the third), so should happen in the Orthodox Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the one who, through his given “autocephaly”, gives life to the National Churches as “autonomous churches”, established in a certain “order/taxis of chairs” or “patriarchies”, an order then confirmed by the Diptychs. In the next part of this study, I shall examine the real meaning of this final argument.

3.2 The Ecclesiology of “primacy” and its basis in the Filioque doctrine

There are two main ideas of the notion of “primacy” promoted by Metropolitan Elpidiphoros. The first is that of the notion of “primacy” expressed in the sense of natural priority held by the bishop about the assembly of the “people of God” for whom he is a shepherd and the primacy of Constantinople over all the

other Orthodox bishops either in a Synod or not. The second idea is that based on its intrinsic ecclesiological value, the “primate” can make decisions at any level in the absence of the community, subservient to him, in the absence of the people of God (if he is a bishop) or even in the absence of all Orthodox bishops (if he is the Ecumenical Patriarch). Both these ideas are in fact based on the Filioque Trinitarian view held by the Roman Catholic Church.

The idea of the bishopric primacy over the community is based on the Augustinian psychological theory, of Divine processions. Thomas de Aquino explains this theory as:

“For it was said before, that the Son proceeds by way of the intellect as Word, and the Holy Ghost by way of the will as Love. Now love must proceed from a word. For we do not love anything unless we apprehend it by a mental conception. Hence also in this way it is manifest that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son” (Thomas de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.36, a.2).

This short text is essential though profoundly dense. The goal of Thomas de Aquino was to argue the causal priority of the Son over the Holy Spirit to prove the “Filioque addendum”. As such, inspired by Augustin’s thinking, he declared the “birth of the Son from the Father” by “the way of the intellect” and “the proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father” by “way of the will”. However, taking into consideration the scholastic principle that:

“Nothing can be wanted unless it is known in advance (*nihil volitum nisi praecognitum*)”⁶.

It means that the “birth of the Son” is prior to the “proceeding of the Holy Spirit”, as “knowledge” precedes “will”. The consequence is that being before the Spirit, the Son also “participates” at the “proceeding of the Holy Spirit, hence the infamous

⁶ Th. De Regnon, *Études de Théologie positive sur La Saint Trinité*, Paris, 1892, vol.2, p.207

conclusion of the Catholic theology that Holy Spirit proceeds “also from the Son (Filioque)”!

Applied in Ecclesiology, this Trinitarian theory, specific to the Latin West suggests that everything people want to adore within the Church pre-exists, and has to pre-exist cognitively in the mind of the bishopric, based on the principle that in order to want something, one must understand it first, one must know what one wants before wanting it. The consequence of this priority of knowledge over will inevitably leads to the idea that the “people of God” represents a mass in absolute “obedience” to the bishopric. The congregation will never want/love something unless it is made known to it by the bishopric.

This theory also has a significant extension in its ecclesiological consequences, and it explains the absolute dependency of the Christian people not only about the bishopric, but also of the bishopric to the Pope.

However, to return to the Trinitarian premises of Catholic ecclesiology, if the act of will is rigorously conditioned upon the prior knowledge of what is wanted, the act of knowledge itself will be conditioned on the clear pre-existence of that object. Hence the second most important principle of the Catholic triadology - the so-called “monarchy of the Father”, of His existential (causal) priority, His absolute “primacy” over the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Within Ecclesiology, this principle leads to the conclusion that if the people must know beforehand from the bishopric what to love/want, so will the bishopric in its turn have to know from the Pope what he decides as being existent. The natural consequence of this is that the people will have to “receive” in complete obedience what the bishopric says and the bishopric cannot decree what the people can know without being in complete communion with the Pope and what he decides as existent and not and therefore what can be known or not. This extension

of the Thomist/Augustinian theory seems to be based on the principle that:

“Nothing can be known without previously existing.”

This is the real origin of the “primacy” notion, of the absolute priority of the Catholic bishopric over the people and of the Pope over the bishopric and the entire Catholic Church.

The second idea included in the notion of “primacy”, that of the possibility of the primate to substitute the community he leads, is based on the so-called “relations theory” postulated by the same Augustin and perfected by Thomas de Aquino. Essentially this theory states that the Divine persons pre-exist inside their cause ahead of their processions; in other words, the Son pre-exists within the Father prior to the act of His birth, and the Holy Spirit pre-exists within the Father prior to His effective proceeding.

By taking this idea from Augustin, Thomas de Aquino will determinedly state that:

“The personal property of the Father can be considered in a twofold sense: firstly, as a relation; and thus again in the order of intelligence it presupposes the notional act, for relation, as such, is founded upon an act: secondly, according as it constitutes the person; and thus the notional act presupposes the relation, as an action presupposes a person acting. (persona agens praeintelligitur actioni)” (Thomas de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I, 40, art. iv).

The Catholic theologian P. de Monleon explains de Aquino’s statement as:

“The Processions (the acts of birth and proceeding) are not sufficient in distinguishing the divine persons: they are a manner of explaining what, in some way they already are” (prior to the processions)⁷.

Dumitru Stăniloae confirms this interpretation by saying that:

⁷ D. Stăniloae, ‘Recent Catholic Studies on Filioque’, *Theological Studies*, 1973, 7-8, p. 487.

“The clear assertion that the intellect and will of the Father are persons before the Son is born and proceeds from the Holy Spirit...comes from a zeal to refute the reproach of Th. de Regnon who states that the Western theology starts from the essence to get to the persons in its explanation of the Trinity, while the theology of the Eastern Fathers starts from the persons to get to the essence. As mentioned earlier, we rejoice at this zeal of the Catholic theologians... to accentuate the reality of the persons in God. However, in their zeal, they somewhat overstep by saying that the Son exists (within the Father) before He is born and the Holy Spirit before He proceeds; meaning that the Son exists independently of birth and the Holy Spirit independently of the proceeding. By saying this, they negate the persons, as one must ask: how is the Son different from the other persons if not through His birth? Moreover, how is the Holy Spirit different from the other persons, if not through His proceeding? Isn't this negation of the birth and proceeding as constituent acts of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the negation of the differences between the divine persons and through this, an actual negation of the reality of the persons?”⁸

The fact that Stăniloae plainly rejected the Filioque theory is not so important. What is truly significant is that the Catholic thinking has translated within its Ecclesiology this Trinitarian model by stating that as the Spirit potentially pre-exists within the Son (and within the Father) prior to His actual proceeding, so does the community of the people of God potentially pre-exist within the bishop that is its shepherd (but most importantly pre-exists within the Pope). The consequence of the application of this principle in Ecclesiology will be that the bishop/priest can dispense when the need arise with the presence of the community when he performs the private masses, but also when he dogmatizes/canonizes within a synod, as the “Ravenna document” states:

⁸ D. Stăniloae, ‘Recent Catholic Studies on Filioque’, ‘Theological Studies’, 1973, 7-8, p. 487f.

“38. Conciliarity or synodality involves, therefore, much more than the assembled bishops. It also involves their Churches. The former are bearers of and give voice to the faith of the latter. The bishops’ decisions have to be received in the life of the Churches, especially in their liturgical life.”

Therefore, there is no right of the people to veto when a bishop is chosen and even less so to the bishopric decisions.

The same principle has been applied in the relationship the Pope has with the rest of the bishopric and even with the entire Catholic Church. As the Father potentially holds within Him the Son (prior to His effective “birth”) and the Holy Spirit (prior to His effective “proceeding”), so does the Pope in regards to the bishopric and the entire “people of God”. By holding them within him, he can dispense with them when he dogmatizes or canonizes. This is why the 2nd Vatican Council states that the “...definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable through themselves and not in the virtue of the Church’s consent.” Moreover, for the same reason, the bishopric cannot lead the people they were entrusted by themselves but only “in unity with the Pope”.

The same “relations theory” is that which explains the ontological stages of the Roman Catholic ecclesiology. By potentially holding within himself the people of God, the bishop holds within his own being a “ecclesiological density” superior to the community, and the Pope, as he potentially holds within himself the entire bishopric but also the Catholic Church, holds within his own being the maximum “ecclesiological density”. This is exactly what the Metropolitan of Bursa is saying when he argues that the ecclesiological primacy that the current Ecumenical Patriarch aspires to is in fact already held by him within his own “person” and not through the accord of the synod of the Orthodox bishops. Staniloae has rejected this absolute “priority” of the Pope, as the Pope cannot claim an “ecclesiological

density” superior to that of a bishop⁹. The notion of the charisma of priority held by the Pope, as suggested by the Roman Catholic thinking, is unequivocally contradicted by the exclusively sacramental origin of any canonical authority within the Church¹⁰. In other words, the Church tradition does not record any service that consecrates the Pope, no specific sacramental procedure to attest such a “charisma”. Therefore, the Ecumenical Patriarch has no reason whatsoever to claim a charisma of priority based on an “ecclesiological density” superior to that of other Orthodox bishops, unless he is willing to renounce the Orthodox, Monopatristic Trinitarian model of understanding the nature of the Church in favor of the filioque one.

This pre-existence of the “primate” about the bishops assembled in a synod, as Patriarch Bartholomew wishes to claim, would establish within the Church an Ecclesiology of ontological diversity, one of the hierarchical steps differentiated one from the other not only “by degree” but also “by distinct essence”. The direct consequence of this would be a progressive staged identification with Christ, which would lead to a veritable gradual “transubstantiation” of the human nature of the priests, bishops but most importantly of the Patriarch about the “people of God”. The consequence of the Filioque-Triadology is a stepped ontology, meaning a stepped divinization of the human nature present within the Church. The proof of this is that within the Catholic Church, a series of doctrines and liturgical practices, completely alien for the Orthodox theology, are quite common (i.e., Corpus Christi, the cult of the Oblate, the cult of the Heart of Christ and even the cult of the blood of Christ).

⁹ D Stăniloae, ‘The Universal Synodal Church’, ‘Orthodoxy’, 1966, 2, p. 194.

¹⁰ S. Selaru, ‘The Church and the churches: Orthodox Ecclesiastic models from an ecumenical perspective’, Editura Universității din București, București, 2015, pp. 89.78.79.

These represent nothing else but forms of a cult of the divinized humanity of Christ while celebrations such as the Immaculate Conception, Assumption cum Corporis or Mariological doctrines like the Corredemptrix, represent forms of a cult of the divinized humanity of the Virgin Mary. Finally, ascetic, self-harm inflicting practices such as the one meant to offer the body the stigmas of Jesus to the person performing the ritual are a sign of the divinization of the human nature based on the model of the divinized human nature of Christ Himself.

The direct consequence of focusing on the human nature and not on the person is that the Catholic Church is a human community structured on progressive ontological steps, in which different groups distinguish from each other through their different “essence”. The bishops lie on a superior ontological step, as they possess a superior “essence” to that of the “people of God” and the Pope is on the supreme ontological step (semi-divine) as he possesses a superior “essence” not only to that of the people but also to that of the bishops (e.g., the infallibility with which he is invested).

However, the most radical consequence of this ontologically stepped ecclesiology is that the superior steps can dispense with the inferior ones. This is why the “primacy” is present at all levels as a “substituent primacy” which can dispense with the ideas of “sinodality” and “conciliarity”. This “substituent” character of the “primate” at all levels of ecclesiology is based on the idea that the “primate” is not dependent on the Church, but on its own essence, one which is superior to that of the “people of God”. The “primate” within the Church would hold, in the minds of those that wish to attribute it to the Ecumenical Patriarch, such power either “per se” or “ex sese” (to use two expressions of the 2nd Vatican Council).

Based on this regime the “primates” hold power “ex sese” and represents a result of their “transubstantiation in steps” of their

nature into the divinized nature of Christ. They (the bishop as “primate” of his eparchy and the Pope as “primate” of the whole Catholic Church) have thus an ontological consistency superior to that of the people (in the case of the bishops) and even to that of the whole Church (in the case of the Pope).

3.3 The Ecclesiology of Conciliarity and its Monopatristic Basis

Starting with the 9th century, the Byzantine theologians firmly opposed the filioque oriented Latin Triadology refusing to interpret in a “causal” manner the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Byzantine alternative to the Latin filioque issue was to affirm, based on a biblical reality the fact that the “Spirit proceeds (only) from the Father and rests within the Son”. Therefore the Holy Spirit does not proceed “from the Son” as well, does not extend over Him but “rests” over Him.

The Byzantine theological thinking preferred thus to look upon the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Son in light of the terms used in the New Testament, terms such as “proceeding (κατάβασις)” (Matthew 3, 16-17; John 1, 32), “resting (ἀναπαύσις)” of the Holy Spirit over the Son (I Peter 4, 14) and “to remain μένω” (John 1, 32). The consequence of this “proceeding” and “resting” of the Holy Spirit over the Son is, according to the same New Testament, the “manifestation (φανέρωσις)” (I Corinthians 12, 7; Corinthians 4, 2) or the “radiance of God’s (the Father) glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης)” (Hebrews 1,3) on the “face” of the Son or “through the Son”. In other words, the biblical text emphasizes that the consequence of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit over the Son is the “manifestation” of the Son as the true Son of the Father, His “manifestation” in the glory of the Father or, His “manifestation as the eternal, glorified face of the Father” as “no one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in

closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” (John I, 18). As a result of the proceeding of the Spirit over Him, the Son appears in its eternal identity, being the “radiance of God’s Glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης)” (Hebrews I, 3).

This fundamental relationship of “manifestation” and “radiance of the Son” as a result of the “proceeding” and “resting” of the Spirit over Him is present in the New Testament in several places. Firstly it appears at the Epiphany of Jesus as the “Son of the Father” at the Baptism He receives in Jordan (Matthew III, 16-17; John I, 32). Secondly, we can find it during the “transfiguration” on Mount Tabor (Matthew XVII, 2; Luke IX, 29; II Peter I, 16-18) and lastly when Jesus shows Himself to John on the Isle of Patmos in the “glory of the resurrection” (the Apocalypse I, 10-18).

All the New Testament terms used earlier to describe, based on biblical sources, the true relationship of the Son with the Holy Spirit only underline the fact that the Son “manifests” Himself into the world in “the (eternal) glory of His Father” as a result of the “proceeding” of the Holy Spirit over Him and over the Church, “His body”. This view suggests an intensification of the presence in the world of the Son as the eschaton, the Kingdom of Heavens, grows nearer to our world, to history as a result of His Embodiment and then of the Pentecost. Of course, it is not a “descent” into the world, but a “manifestation” of His divine being and this is where the true difference between Catholicism and Orthodoxy lies.

We know that the divine being will remain forever inaccessible not only to man but any creature, may it be an angel, archangel or cherubim. Moreover, yet, we believe in the real Embodiment of God in Jesus Christ and its real Proceeding over the Church during Pentecost. As such, the following question arises: what has “embodied” in Jesus Church and what has “proceeded” at the Pentecost, if the being of the Father will remain eternally

inaccessible to any creature? The answer in both cases is that God who has “proceeded” into the world, in history is, in fact, the person of the Son at the Embodiment and the person of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost. The consequence of the presence in the world of the divine, “eternal” persons/hypostasis is not an intensification of the divine, “ontological” presence, as shown by Catholic ecclesiology, but a divine, “hypostatic” presence, as suggested by Orthodox theology. This interpretation is rigorously coherent with the theory of Theodor the Studite who, at the end of his fight against the iconoclasts, explained that what we see in the icon of Jesus Christ, Son of God is not His divine being, His “Godliness” as it is understood ontologically, but His eternal “person/hypostasis”.

This fundamental difference explains the sacramental abyssal gap between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the form of a radical difference between the Latin concept of the “divinisation” of the human nature, specific to Catholic ecclesiology on the one hand, and the concept of “godliness” of the same nature, but referring to the human person, specific to Orthodoxy on the other. This radical discrepancy also explains the profound difference between the two faiths in regards to how the nature of the “bishopric” in general and that of the “universal primacy” specifically is seen. The notion of “divinization” is an ontological one and implies a differentiation in essence of the bishopric with the “people of God” and of the Pope with the bishopric (and of course with the Church as a whole). The notion of “theosis” on the contrary, is a “hypostatic” one, referring to persons. Persons, however, are by distinct definition realities “in relation” with each other, which means that the divine persons are not “in relation” only with each other, but they are also “in relation” with the human persons who form the Church. Applied to Ecclesiology, this also means that the bishopric, as a true “relational bishopric” will be meaningless in the absence of a strong

relationship with the “people of God” and with the Church itself – as it is required by the theory of the “primate” which requires the bishopric to be above the Church.

Therefore, the consequences of the monopatristic triadology will be completely different regarding Ecclesiology. The “proceeding of the Holy Spirit” over the apostle (and over his descendent the bishop) makes him an “envoy” of Jesus Christ in the midst of the people he is meant to evangelize. The apostles are not realities “in themselves”, gifted with a superior “ontological density”, and placed on an ontological step superior to that of the people of God and the other hierarchical steps. They are realities “in a permanent and fundamental relation” to the entire Church. The apostles and the bishops of the Christian Church do not possess a “quality” in itself independent to the people in the midst of which they were “sent”. They are what they are only “in relation” to this people, as in the absence of such a “relation” their purpose as set by Jesus Christ Himself is lost. Though not mandated by the people, they cannot exist without the people. The apostles can only exist as part of the people, in the midst of the “people of God”.

It is exactly their quality as “apostles”, of “envoys” that makes them absolutely dependent on the people. “The people of God” represents their *raison d’être* and as a result, they cannot have an authority “*per se*” or “*ex sese*” but only an authority as part and within the Church. This authority is sent to them “*ex alterum*”, from the future world as exponents of another Kingdom. Their authority does not come from the past, but the future, from *eschaton*, i.e., from that Spirit of God which “rests” over them from ordination and makes them true “envoys” of Christ into the world and the Church. That is also why they can never substitute the people (in the case of bishops without an eparchy) nor can they substitute the other apostles/bishops (in

the case of those who aspire to be “primates” of the whole Church).

Based on this premise, we can assert without hesitation that the essence of Orthodox ecclesiology is the progressive propagation in the humanity of theosis, which represents a notion fundamentally linked with the relation of the divine hypostasis of Christ with the human hypostasis. This is the profound reason why Roman Catholic liturgical phenomenon like those above (i.e., the cult of the divinized humanity of Jesus, that of the divinized humanity of the Virgin and even that of the self-divinization of bishops and the Pope) are completely alien to Orthodoxy.

All these are inexistent in the cultic and ideological practice of Orthodoxy since the entire cult of the Orthodox Church is directed towards the divine person/hypostasis of the Son of God and not His human nature. The fact that the notion of “manifestation” of His glory is understood in the Orthodox mentality as a “manifestation” of His divine hypostasis and not “His divine nature”, explains the absence in Orthodoxy of the Catholic practices afore mentioned. This means that within the Orthodox Ecclesiology the notion of a stepped ontological hierarchy with a “universal primate” at its head is impossible. The understanding of the presence of Christ in the Church using the notion of “hypostasis” and not that of “nature/essence”, means that in reality the bishop, regardless of his place in the Church hierarchy, will always be “in relation to Christ” during his mission and never “in lieu of Christ” as an “alter Christus” before the people as supported by the Catholic ecclesiological thinking.

Using a monopatristic Trinitarian premise, the Orthodox Ecclesiology will be based on the notion of the theosis of man as a person not his divinization as nature. It is the fundamental reason for which the Orthodox Ecclesiology rejects any notion of “primate” in the sense of an ontological differentiation between

the one holding this title and the people of God and other bishops. Therefore, the “manifestation (phanerosis)” in the world of the Son as a divine person and not that of “transformation (transsubstantio)” represents the fundamental notion on which ecclesiology ought to be found. The first applies to the hypostasis of Christ and correctly explains the notion of man’s “theosis” within the Church, while the second refers to the human nature of Christ and explains the notion of a “stepped divinization” of the members of the Catholic hierarchy within the Church.

However, the most important consequence of the monopatristic ecclesiology is the refusal of the Orthodox Church to perceive the Church as a structured human community based on progressive ontological steps, as it is perceived in Catholicism. Using the divine and “theosis” hypostasis of Christ, the Church is fundamentally conciliatory, i.e., an assembly of equal hypostasis placed necessarily “in relation” with each other and called together (the human hypostasis) to be in the image and likeness of God Himself, who is the divine hypostasis of the Son. The Church is, in fact, an assembly of human hypostasis placed in an ever closer relationship with the embodied divine hypostasis. Its glory has firstly manifested itself to the apostles, and continues to manifest itself during the Divine Liturgy to those worthy of “seeing the light”, i.e., the “glory of the resurrection” and implicitly that of the “(eternal) divine glory”.

4 Conclusions

To conclude, the present study has attempted to prove, both historically as well as theologically that the supreme authority in all orthodox matters ought to be the Pan Orthodox Synod, to which all decision must be subordinated, including the person of any “primate”, may it be national or ecumenical. More so, it

has tried to prove that while “synod” and “synodality” are theological notions, the “primate” is not. The primate is nothing more than a political, ecclesiastical quality which resulted from the mere coincidence between an eparchy and the capital of a country and that of the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The aspirations of Patriarch Bartholomew based on the papal model and the latinophron thinking of the theologians around him are the real problem Orthodoxy faces today, not only from a judicial/canonic standpoint but also ecclesiological, i.e., dogmatically.

The separation of the Russian Church from the whole ecumenical process started in Ravenna and recorded in the “document” of the Mixt Commission, is due specifically to the purely Catholic theses signed by the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchy and other Patriarchies solidary with it. Paragraphs 39 and 40 of the “Ravenna document” unequivocally suggest that the unity and accuracy of the faith were maintained in the 1st millennium by the “brotherly relations” between the bishops who were “in communion with the seat of Rome” or “in communion with the seat of Constantinople”. In other words, it was not the assembly of bishops in synods that maintained the “unity of the Church” but the communion of bishops with the “primates” of Rome and Constantinople. The historical reality, however, contradicts this thesis which records both the popes (e.g., Vergilius) as well as some ecumenical patriarchs as heretics (e.g., from Nestorius to Cyril Lucaris).

We must, therefore, understand that is not the communion with the “seat of Constantinople” that represents the guarantee of Orthodoxy within the local Orthodox Churches, but maintaining a communion with these and with each other that holds the guarantee of Orthodoxy of the Ecumenical Patriarch.