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# Universal Synodality: An Orthodox Experience



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HAVING JUST RESIGNED in the middle of the Second Ecumenical Council because of the participants' refusal to affirm the Holy Spirit as *homoousion* with the Father and the Son, St. Gregory the Theologian said, "Synods and Councils I salute from a distance, for I know how troublesome they are. Never again will I sit in those gatherings of cranes and geese."<sup>1</sup> But Orthodox theology and Orthodox experience look at Councils kindlier, considering synodality an essential characteristic of the church.

The term "synod" refers primarily to a gathering of bishops who exercise their ministry together. It comes from the Greek words *syn* (with) and *odos* (way), and so suggests "walking together along the same path." Its etymology implies both that the church remains pilgrim as it advances towards the Kingdom of God and that one cannot travel along this path in isolation. In a larger sense, "synodality" and its synonym, "conciliarity" refer not only to the episcopate, but to all the baptized members of the church, as they exercise their responsibilities together.<sup>2</sup>

In the first millennium, the Orthodox Church has been synodal at all levels:

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1. Gregory of Nazianzus, Letter 124, *Poems about Himself*, xvii, 91, quoted in Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, New ed. (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 35-36.
  2. I have explored this subject in Radu Bordeianu, "Local Synodality: An Unnoticed Change," in *Changing the Church: Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life*, ed. Mark Chapman and Vladimir Latinovic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 341-50.

parish, diocese, regional, and universal. Since then, Orthodoxy has become less synodal at the universal level, but, in varying degrees, increasingly conciliar at the other levels, with different levels of lay involvement. The present article focuses on the theme of synodality at the universal level by addressing briefly the criteria for considering a Council ecumenical, the distinction between consensus and unanimity, the involvement of the entire church in synodality through consultation and reception and, in greater detail, the need for an Eastern-type of universal primacy that would facilitate universal synodality.

### ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

The Apostolic Council in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 provides a partial glimpse of synodality in the Apostolic Church. “Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed [by the community in Antioch] to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders.” These delegates consulted along the way with other communities, and when they arrived in Jerusalem, “the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.” After Peter, Paul, and Barnabas spoke, James took the role of mouthpiece for the Council. Moreover, “the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” chose representatives *omothumadon*—“with one accord” (NKJV) or “unanimously” (NRSV)—in order to disseminate the decision of the Council, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit (“it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”)<sup>3</sup> This Apostolic Council became the (perhaps idealized) template for future councils, with emphasis on churches designating representatives, a process of consultation, plurality of voices represented at the council, inspiration by the Holy Spirit, unanimity (or maybe consensus), a mouthpiece for the council, a conciliar decision, and its dissemination. Clearly, the Apostolic Church was synodal—a shared responsibility that included the Apostles, the elders, and all the faithful.

By the second century, local churches canonized synodality by being comprised of one bishop, surrounded by a council of elders whose role was consultation and administration, assisted by deacons entrusted with social-charitable responsibilities, and all the faithful with various charisms. The same was true at a regional level, where local churches supported each other financially, exchanged letters, strengthened each other in times of martyrdom, prayed for one another, and appealed to one another regarding doctrinal and disciplinary is-

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3. Acts 15:2, 6, 22, 25, and 28 respectively.

sues. Regional synods gradually increased in number, gathering the bishops of a certain region together, thus showing that episcopacy is a ministry that cannot be exercised in isolation.

As local churches from larger regions (such as around Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch), and then throughout the entire Christian world faced similar challenges, synods expanded to include representatives of more metropolitan areas. Orthodoxy recognizes seven of these councils as ecumenical. Based on the ideals of the Apostolic Council outlined above, the seven ecumenical councils have been received as authoritative instances of the Tradition due to the importance of their proclamations of faith, the consultation with the faithful and theologians, the large representation of various local churches, the consensus achieved during their works, and the reception of their decisions especially in liturgical life.<sup>4</sup>

Having mentioned several criteria for recognizing a council as ecumenical, it is important to state that Orthodoxy in fact does not have a fool-proof system of recognizing the ecumenical status of a Council. Significant exceptions to the above-listed rules prove this point. For example, the rule that a council needs to represent the entire Christian world to be ecumenical is challenged in two ways. First, a Council could gather a large number of bishops without being ecumenical; the Council of Hieria (754)—which condemned the veneration of icons—boasted the participation of over 400 bishops from various parts of the Empire and regarded itself as ecumenical, but it was received neither by the Pope, the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, together with their clergy, nor by the Council of Nicaea II (787). Second, a Council could be convened as a regional synod, but later be received as ecumenical; such was the case of Constantinople I (381), which only gathered around 150 bishops (without representatives from Rome), but whose Creed became the primary confession of faith for all Christians.<sup>5</sup> In both these examples, it transpires that a Council's own claim of ecumenicity is not a sufficient criterion, since Hieria considered itself ecumenical but it was not received as such, while Constantinople did not

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4. The Orthodox Church recognizes as ecumenical the following councils: Nicaea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), Constantinople III (680-681), and Nicaea II (787).

5. St. Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, "Serving Communion: Re-Thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality," (2018): #7.10.

regard itself as ecumenical, and yet it was received in this way.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, participation from all geographical areas is not a condition of ecumenicity, either, since Hieria fulfilled this condition, while Constantinople did not. Nor can it be said that a Council is ecumenical only if it has been affirmed by a subsequent ecumenical Council, since the last ecumenical Council cannot be confirmed by a later ecumenical council. Last but not least, the reception by the people of God is extremely difficult to gauge, since reception can last for centuries—more than fifteen centuries in the case of Eastern-Oriental Orthodox reception of the decisions of the third and fourth ecumenical Councils: in the twentieth century, the two churches concluded that there are no Christological and soteriological divisions between them, and that their historical differences stem from terminological and historical conflicts, rather than the essence of their faith.

### CONSENSUS, NOT UNANIMITY

Surprisingly important today is the distinction between consensus and unanimity as a condition for the reception of a Council. Unanimity requires that all conciliar bishops agree, giving veto privileges to each bishop. In the case of consensus, the majority decision moves forward while acknowledging the reservations of the dissenting minority. The Apostolic Council's mode of deciding *omothumadon*—"with one accord" (NKJV) or "unanimously" (NRSV Acts 15:25)—became a model for future Councils, many synods claiming unanimity. But unanimity seems to be more an ideal than a fact. The Book of Acts refers to the public opposition by those who wanted to impose circumcision upon Gentile Christians, an opposition that continued after the Council, as illustrated by the pervasiveness of this issue in later Pauline Letters (e.g., Rom. 2:29). Thus, the Jerusalem Council decided by consensus rather than unanimity. Moreover, the ecumenical Councils went down in history as having decided unanimously, which is more a figure of speech, suggesting their inspiration (similar to the Apostolic Council), rather than a historical fact. After all, the Arians present at the First Ecumenical Council did not embrace the Orthodox doctrine immediately and the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils resulted in the painful schism with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, so unanimity was counted only after the

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6. The Councils of Lyons II (1274) and Ferrara-Florence (1448-1449) also regarded themselves as ecumenical, but the East did not receive them as such. The West considered them ecumenical until mid-twentieth century, when they started being counted among the "general" councils of the Catholic Church.

dissenting minority left the Council. Thus, the ecumenical Councils reveal the consensus method as the traditional one.

Later on, no autocephalous<sup>7</sup> Orthodox church adopted the model of unanimity concerning its internal matters. It was only in the decades of preparation for the 2016 Council of Crete that the principle of unanimity was imposed in Orthodoxy. From its beginnings, it was a means for the minority to paralyze the majority. I have argued elsewhere that this tactic has a precedent when the Catholic Church invited the Orthodox Church to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. When all Orthodox Churches sent representatives at Rhodes I (1961) to discern their response to this invitation, the Russian Patriarchate insisted that all autocephalous Orthodox churches should act in unison in their interaction with the West. This system of unanimity under the guise of Orthodox unity was in fact the USSR's tactic to control the entire Orthodox world. As one of the Russian delegates, Vitaly Borovoi, explained in his report to the KGB, without the Russian delegation's intervention in Rhodes, Constantinople and the other Greek churches would have sent their observers to the Second Vatican Council and the Russian Church would have remained isolated in its opposition. Instead, Constantinople and the other churches that shared its vision, became unable to act without Moscow's accord. Borovoi concluded in terms that clearly show that the principle of unanimity was simply a means to control other churches: "The key to solve the problem of Orthodox observers is now in Moscow, it is not in Constantinople."<sup>8</sup>

In what might be nothing more than a historical coincidence, before the opening of the Council of Crete in 2016, this distinction between consensus and unanimity again came to the forefront. Attempting to ensure that no single bishop could hold the entire council captive, some Orthodox Churches proposed the consensus method, while others (including the Moscow Patriarchate) insisted on unanimity. The latter group of churches ended up not participating at the council.

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7. Etymologically, "autocephalous" means "having its own head." An autocephalous Church—often referring to an Orthodox Church within a certain nation or geographical region—is fully united in faith and liturgy with the other Orthodox churches, but it is administratively independent, free to elect its own leader ("head") and to lead itself in all practical aspects of ecclesial life.

8. Quoted in Adriano Rocucci, "Russian Observers at Vatican II: The 'Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs' and the Moscow Patriarchate between Anti-Religious Policy and International Strategies," in *Vatican II in Moscow (1959–1965): Acts of the Colloquium on the History of Vatican II. Moscow, March 30–April 2, 1995*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Leuven: Library of the Faculty of Theology K.U. Leuven, 1997), 66-67. See Radu Bordeianu, "Orthodox Observers at the Second Vatican Council and Intra-Orthodox Dynamics," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2018), 86–106.

The same national churches that found the consensus method insufficient for Crete, have previously embraced it not only in their internal matters, but also in the WCC. When Orthodox participation in the WCC was called into question because Orthodox Churches were regularly outvoted, the WCC adopted the consensus method, which stipulates that the majority works with the minority until the minority either fully embraces their position, or can step aside in humility, ready to support the majority decision or at least not oppose it. The minority position is acknowledged in the final document.<sup>9</sup>

Having said that, consensus does not guarantee Orthodox doctrine and life, which are not proclaimed through plebiscites. At times, the dissenting minority was the one that remained Orthodox, as was the case in the fourth century, when the majority of the East was Arian or Semi-Arian, and a small dissenting minority retreated in the desert where it kept the true faith.<sup>10</sup>

### CONSULTATION AND RECEPTION

The above considerations raise the important question of the participation of the entire church—not only conciliar bishops—in the process of proclaiming the faith in synods. Councils included lay participation from the beginning. The Jerusalem Apostolic Council took place in the presence of an assembly (Acts 15:12), local synods gathered during Cyprian's time in the Church of Carthage “with a multitude of faithful present” expressing their opinions,<sup>11</sup> and at the First Ecumenical Council, the laity eagerly defended the party of their choice.<sup>12</sup> Other similar instances abound throughout history and they all stem from the conviction that the revealed truth rests in the church in its totality, clergy and laity alike, and not in the clergy alone. Rather, before taking a position at a

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9. WCC's Eighth Assembly in Harare (1998) also ensured that the consensus method does not give the power of veto to every single delegate by allowing an 85% majority to still call for a formal vote as a last result after earnestly considering the minority position. Historically, when a small number of members, who are known to generally cause dissension, refuse to accept the majority position, the decision moves forward without mentioning the minority position.

10. Georges Florovsky, "The Tragedy of Christian Divisions," in *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Emeritus Professor of Eastern Church History, Harvard University; Vol. 13 (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Company, 1989), 33.

11. Cyprian, Epistle, 13:31, quoted in John N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Seminary Press, 1994), 14.

12. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.8, quoted in Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity*, 14.

Council, the bishop is supposed to consult with his diocese and ensure that he expresses not simply his personal opinion, but the faith of his flock.

A contemporary universal synodality needs to ascribe a significant role to the laity, parish priests, and theologians. God works through his entire people, hence, a synodal church is participative and co-responsible. The faithful can be consulted today on a scale that earlier in history was simply un-imaginable, but now made possible by technological advances. Moreover, before the Council of Crete, numerous conferences throughout the world discussed the conciliar draft documents, scholars published articles, and North American theologians published commentaries on pre-conciliar drafts in a volume that some conciliar bishops read before Crete.<sup>13</sup>

This process of consultation is traditional. Early councils included deacons (such as St. Athanasius the Great whose thought shaped Nicaea I) or referred to the works of simple monks (posthumously, St. Maximus the Confessor's thought represents the basis of Constantinople III) and emperors (Justinian—Constantinople II), even though only bishops voted on doctrinal matters.<sup>14</sup> The rule that only bishops are allowed to vote should not change, but it should be observed in the earnest, giving a vote only to bishops who represent a community of faithful and not to titular or honorific bishops ordained for defunct sees, since a bishop should vote only after consultation with the faithful and especially parish priests and theologians in his diocese. This consultation is especially important today, since it is no longer the case, as it was in the early church, that the most influential theologians were also bishops, so that synodal decisions represented the consensus of the theological community.

While these instances fall under the general category of *consultation*, another way in which the communion between the clergy and the people is manifested prophetically is through the process of reception, in which the teachings of a Council have to be recognized by the entire church, especially in its liturgy. Sometimes, the process of reception took very intense forms, exciting spirits.

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13. Nathanael Symeonides, ed. *Toward the Holy and Great Council: Theological Reflections* (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2016).

14. The 1917–1918 Moscow Council experienced the highest level of lay participation in Orthodox history. It gathered more lay representatives (299) than clergy (265), ensuring lay participation from parish council, to diocesan and patriarchal structures. John Meyendorff and Nicholas Lossky (revisions), *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 112. While appreciating the extraordinary circumstances in which the Moscow Council took place, Afanasiev has a generally negative view of these changes, since the laity do not have the ministries of governance and witness. Nicolas Afanassieff, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Vitaly Permiakov (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 65-69.



Compared to twenty-first century complacency, it is rather humorous to read the complaint of some Fathers of the Church about the faithful's involvement in matters of faith. Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa were quite vocal in their dissatisfaction with the theological arguments that existed everywhere in their cities. The latter saint writes:

The whole city is full of [debates about incomprehensible matters], the squares, the market places, the cross-roads, the alleyways; old-clothes men, money changers, food sellers: they are all busy arguing. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask "Is my bath ready?" the attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing.<sup>15</sup>

Reception is a communal discernment process, it can be a combative one, and it can take a very long time. And yet, the teaching authority of the church lies in the reception of the entire church, and not in ecumenical synods alone, as Dumitru Staniloae writes. The inner authority of the entire church encompasses all its members, i.e., clergy and the people alike, its history, interior life, synods, and their reception.<sup>16</sup> This common responsibility for the faith does not nullify the differences between various ministries in the church. The priests and the bishops educate the faithful and verify their faith before the distribution of the Eucharist. The faithful, on their part, discern the faith of the clergy when that faith is reflected in sermons. The faithful can either accept the content of the sermon as reflective of the faith of the church, or raise their voice to express their rejection. In this sense, the 1848 Encyclical of the Eastern patriarchs who responded to Pope Pius IX's claim of papal infallibility states, on the one hand, that the entire church (clergy and laity) is infallible, and neither one bishop alone, nor all the bishops collectively. On the other hand, it affirms the distinction that the faithful are the "shields" of the truth, while bishops are the "judges."<sup>17</sup>

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15. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Deity of the Son*, PG xlvii:557B, quoted in Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 35.

16. Dumitru Staniloae, "Autoritatea Bisericii [the Authority of the Church]," *Studii Teologice* 16, no. 3-4 (1964), 198.

17. Olivier Clément, *You Are Peter: An Orthodox Theologian's Reflection on the Exercise of Papal Primacy* (New York: New City Press, 2003), 13.

## THE NEED FOR AN EASTERN-TYPE OF UNIVERSAL PRIMACY

Today, Orthodox episcopal synodality is most efficient at the level of autocephalous churches because it is sustained by primacy. At ecumenical encounters, the Orthodox have insisted on primacy as *primus inter pares* (first among equals), emphasizing the equality of all bishops and being hesitant to recognize more than a primacy of honor that is rather devoid of authority. Internally, however, the Orthodox are not hesitant about primacy. Primate<sup>18</sup> of national churches have a significant degree of authority, as we shall see momentarily. This section argues that a similar type of primacy is necessary at a universal level in order to support synodality.

Before going any further, it is important to clarify that universal primacy and universal synodality refer here internally to the Orthodox world, and not to the entire Christianity. If the ecumenical Council gathers representatives of all local churches and if its decisions are to be accepted by the entire church, in the present context of schism, it is practically impossible to convene an ecumenical Council. The World Council of Churches does not claim to be such a Council, although its Assemblies come the closest to an ecumenical Council in a disunited church. Hence, denominations can experience universal synodality only internally, in separation from other denominations.

In the case of today's Orthodox Church, a pan-Orthodox Council comes the closest to universal synodality, but it is merely a remote possibility. The 2016 Council of Crete should have been an impetus for universal synodality, but the opposite happened when four of the fourteen national churches withdrew shortly before the Council. Pan-Orthodox synodality is paralyzed by internal political conflicts and by fear of the segment of Orthodoxy that opposes ecumenism, openness to society, and progress. In order to restore universal synodality, the East needs to create a workable view of universal primacy, avoiding the mistakes of the past.

At a very superficial level, Orthodoxy has the solution to the tension between primacy and synodality: the Patriarch of Constantinople is *primus inter pares*—first among equals. Unfortunately, its practical application is far from providing an Eastern model of primacy that would have enough authority to

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18. In Orthodox parlance, a "primate" is the head of an autocephalous or an autonomous Church. Sometimes, the primate has the title of Patriarch (e.g. of Constantinople), other times the primate is an Archbishop (e.g. Greece), while other times the primate is a Metropolitan (e.g. Orthodox Church in America).

make synodality possible, while also ensuring that no bishop stands above the others. Constantinople certainly went too far with its claim of primacy in the past. For example, in what may sound both comical and aggravating today, in the fourteenth century, Patriarch Philotheos of Constantinople wrote to the princes of Russia: "Since God has appointed Our Humility as leader of all Christians found anywhere on the inhabited earth, as solicitor and guardian of their souls, all of them depend on me, the father and teacher of them all."<sup>19</sup> After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, other Orthodox leaders would make similar claims under the assumption that Christianity cannot endure without a "Rome," meaning a bishop who has primacy over all the rest.

Since the first Rome fell to the Goths and was now Catholic and the second Rome fell first under the West during the fourth crusade (1204) and then under the Ottomans (1453), who would take the role of the third Rome? In the early thirteenth century, an independent Bulgarian Patriarchate was established in the capital city of T'rnovo, which began being called the "Third Rome."<sup>20</sup> Later on in the same thirteenth century, after the Mongols sacked Kiev, the city of Novgorod replaced Kiev as the Orthodox capital of Rus' Orthodoxy and borrowed from T'rnovo the same title of "Third Rome."<sup>21</sup> The next center of Rus' Orthodoxy, namely Moscow, gradually made the same claim of being the "Third Rome." The tsars treated it with caution, as they feared that it gave the Church too much power. But the clergy and the people used it relentlessly, culminating with the letter of monk Filofei from the monastery of Pskov to Grad Prince Vasilii III, in the mid-1520s. In it, Filofei reminds the prince that the first Rome fell away into heresy (by which he meant the *Filioque*, which he clumsily related to Apollinarianism), while the second Rome was overtaken by the unbelieving Ottomans. The tsar's destiny was to preside

in the new, third Rome, your mighty *tsarstvo*' [empire], to shine like the sun throughout the whole universe, and to endure as long as the world endures: you are the only Tsar for Christians in the whole world [...] Two Romes have fallen and the third stands. A fourth will not be.<sup>22</sup>

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19. Quoted in Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 482.

20. *Christianity*, 473.

21. *Christianity*, 513.

22. See *Christianity*, 524-25. Emmanuel Lanne, "The Three Romes," in *The Holy Russian Church and Western Christianity*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Oscar Beozzo (London, Maryknoll: SCM Press, Orbis, 1996), 10-16.

In contrast to these exaggerated claims of Eastern primacy stand the equally *exaggerated claims of absolute equality among bishops*. It is true that all bishops are equal from a sacramental point of view, regardless of administrative rank. It is also true that one of the merits of Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology was to emphasize the catholicity of the episcopal church, and not of the national autocephalous church—a unit that is “half political and half ecclesial. [...] To this latter, alone, modern Orthodox theology ascribes the ability to be free and autonomous. Orthodox theology indeed rejects the idea of primacy on the universal scale, but it recognizes a partial primacy at the center of every autocephalous church, a primacy belonging to the head of that church.”<sup>23</sup>

At its best, Orthodoxy has the ability to embrace both the sacramental equality of all bishops and the reality that liturgical celebrations, administrative bodies, and synods require a primate with a real authority. In this realistic vein, none of the national Orthodox churches functions without a primate who has real authority. As Zizioulas writes,

It would be a mistake to regard the authority of let us say a patriarch in relation to a synod in the Orthodox Church as simply a primacy of honor, as it is often stated by Orthodox theologians. There is certainly more to this primacy than simple “honor.” The patriarch can convoke a synod and set its agenda. His presence is a *sine qua non* condition for all canonical deliberations, such as the election of bishops, etc. This means that the synod cannot function without its head.<sup>24</sup>

The authority of the primate within a national church thus includes calling the Council, setting its agenda, ensuring the participation of the bishops in the Council, and speaking on behalf of the Council once a decision is made—a decision that the entire synod supports publicly. Moreover, the primate represents the national church in its relations with secular authorities and other churches. This practical situation reveals primacy as an ecclesiological concept that extends the authority of the primate beyond his immediate jurisdiction, but only as commonly agreed within episcopal synodality, and not in a way that supercedes the authority of the local bishop in his own diocese in pastoral matters.

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23. Nicolas Afanassieff, “The Church Which Presides in Love,” in *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 142-43.

24. John D. Zizioulas, “The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection,” *The Jurist* 48 (1988), 380.

One might wrongly assume that, if all Orthodox churches agree with the concept of a real primacy within their own borders, then automatically they all agree with this same concept of real primacy at pan-Orthodox and—in a united church—at universal level. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Many ills stem from Orthodoxy's refusal to have a pan-Orthodox primate with the same authority that primates have within their own national churches.

The most common way to refer to the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch at pan-Orthodox level is that of "*primacy of honor*" (*presbeia tēs timēs*), as designated by the Second Ecumenical Council. The understanding of primacy of honor varies greatly within Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox Church regards it as purely honorific, while the Patriarchate of Constantinople invokes it to convene Councils, grant autocephaly, hear appeals, etc.<sup>25</sup> As Brian Daley conclusively shows, the Church of the Councils did not know of a purely honorific type of primacy. When the third canon of the Council of Constantinople (381) first introduced "primacy of honor" and when the twenty-eighth canon of the Council of Chalcedon (451) reaffirmed it, this type of primacy referred to a jurisdictional authority to make binding decisions, a first rank of leadership, pastoral responsibility, patronage (understood as reviewing and ratifying episcopal elections, ordaining bishops, mediating disputes, and being respected by the bishops who were expected to be loyal)—all these in an other-worldly sense and not in the sense in which imperial power was exercised. Later on, twelfth-century Byzantine writers, such as Ioannis Zonaras and Theodore Balsamon, presented a primacy that became devoid of real authority and largely ceremonial, referring to the order of liturgical commemorations, listings in synodal documents, the right to wear a Phrygian cap, a chain representing the office, a scepter, and the right to ride a horse.<sup>26</sup> The Russian interpretation of primacy of honor is rooted in this latter interpretation. Rejecting a ceremonial conception of primacy, however, Zizioulas applies the model of the primates of autocephalous churches discussed above to the Ecumenical Patriarch, whose authority is real, well beyond a mere

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25. Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, "Serving Communion," #11.4.

26. Brian E. Daley, "The Meaning and Exercise of 'Primacies of Honor' in the Early Church," in *Primacy in the Church: The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils. Vol. 1: Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. John Chryssavgis (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 37, 49-50. "Position and Patronage in the Early Church: The Original Meaning of 'Primacy of Honour,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 2 (1993), 529-53.

“primacy of honor,”<sup>27</sup> but it should not be confused with universal jurisdiction:

The patriarch of Constantinople could not interfere in the affairs of the other patriarchates, but would be responsible for the canonical order within them and intervene only when asked to do so in cases of emergency or disturbance and anomaly of some kind. He would also be responsible for the convocation of councils dealing with matters pertaining to the entire Orthodox Churches, always with the consent of the other patriarchs.<sup>28</sup>

After the failure of the Ecumenical Patriarch to ensure the participation of all autocephalous churches at the Council of Crete in 2016, Zizioulas’s contention that, as the *primus* in the East, the Patriarch of Constantinople convenes Councils pertaining to issues that affect the entire Orthodox world strikes a tragic note. Without a doubt, a greater level of authority is necessary for an efficient exercise of the universal ministry of unity and of synodality—so dear to Orthodox hearts. It should be possible to exercise a pan-Orthodox form of primacy with real authority, similar to the primacy that national churches experience internally. An Eastern primate should be able to convene synods and set their agendas, speak for the entire Eastern Christianity, ensure that individual bishops follow the church’s discipline within their own dioceses, hear appeals, and discipline bishops.

Furthermore, the Orthodox primate could have the authority to oversee the synodal life of world-wide Orthodoxy, but his decisions could be overturned by a large percentage of votes of the primates of the other autocephalous churches. This presupposes that

1. The Orthodox primate convenes regular (ideally yearly) synaxes of the primates of autocephalous churches,
2. He can enforce the participation of all primates for example by having the right to use the vote of absent churches as he considers appropriate,
3. All primates identify the benefits of fully remaining part of this pan-Orthodox synodality that decides based on consensus, not unanimity, and

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27. John D. Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach,” in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church – “Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue”: A Symposium Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society of the Atonement*, Rome, December 4–6, 1997, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 123.

28. “Primacy in the Church,” 122. *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 144–45.

4. In the case in which a small group of churches refuses to work towards a common resolution, the majority moves on. Hopefully, no one will risk being left behind.

Perhaps such a model of primacy in the East could make possible pan-Orthodox synodality.

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