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### **SYNODALITY AND LOCAL CHURCHES: THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION\***

**Abstract:** *This article discusses the place of the Orthodox Church in a global society. It is argued that some the usual areas of criticism of religion within postmodern discourse are also areas of criticism within Orthodox theology (such as the reification of Truth and Church). The apostolic, traditionalist and also missionary dimension of the Church is reaffirmed within a pluralist, globalized society. The perichoretic model of Orthodox ecclesiology is developed to some extent, and it is shown how, in relation to it, postmodern criticism can be a healthy, yet challenging influence on traditional ecclesiology.*

**Keywords:** *Orthodox ecclesiology; postmodernism; globalization; mission; Orthodoxy in the UK.*

It is true that concepts such as 'globalization' and 'postmodernism' are often met with suspicion, to say the least, by many Christian communities, not least among them, Orthodox communities. Very often this sounds more than a generic fear of the unknown, because with the exception of academic theologians who may discover and study intellectual connections between certain pivotal figures in recent Christian history, and postmodern writers (Wittgenstein in particular seems to be a preferred postmodern character for this sort of thing), the majority of the Christian communities have an instinctive reaction to the words 'globalization' and 'postmodernism' similar to the reaction to such words as 'secularization' or 'neo-liberalism', as part of a vague yet distinctly menacing international conspiracy that threatens to change the status quo of the Church and challenge its hard-earned rights.

The first observation we can make here, even before we get to an attempt to discuss postmodernism and globalization, is that this is consistent with an understanding of the development of the Church in a linear manner of expansion, according to which it is prudent to defend and maintain the advancements that were achieved in the past, and try to build on them and expand them further - in a way not too different from the way a business works. While it is true that the Church has a temporal element and it has to operate in the world, we are missing the point if we let the Church be defined by it.

But to return to the question of globalization and postmodernism, our first difficulty is that these concepts are rather difficult to define. If we try to approach them from a financial, pragmatic point of view, and argue that a globalized economy implies a close connection or rather a unification of local markets and economies, so that it would be

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difficult to consider the local without reference to the global and vice versa, we may also see the counter-argument, according to which it is possible, albeit in a much lesser or less dramatic degree, to find such connections of cultural, financial and even religious impact throughout our past. The introduction of vowels in written language, which occurred in the Greek alphabet a few millennia ago and resulted in the form of written thought as we understand it today, or the introduction of punch cards in the mechanical loom in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century which prepared the way for modern computers, may be seen as examples of events that took place with reference to certain local needs, yet quickly had global effects. The theory according to which the effect of the proverbial flap of the wings of a butterfly in New York can result in an earthquake in Japan, true or not, holds as much water now, as it did ten centuries ago. What may be different is the way we understand and define such connections: when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III in the eighth century was giving the order to take down the icon of Christ from the Bronze Gate in Constantinople, he was probably not aware that he was starting a process that would contribute in the alienation between Eastern and Western Christianity at a very critical time, thus allowing Rome in the following few centuries to gravitate towards the emerging powers of Western Europe, and changing the religious map of Christendom for many centuries. Such interpretive connections were not attempted for centuries. Nevertheless, our more advanced historiography, which tries to take notice of such subtle links, has not yet proven that it can do so from a privileged point of view, and thus bring about a more peaceful or more spiritually heightened world.

Perhaps in a way that is known to us in a rather experiential way,<sup>1</sup> a postmodern, globalized culture is expressed in a relative breakdown of many ethnic and national boundaries, and also a certain degree of cultural eclecticism. Therefore, examples such as that of an American taxi-driver in Paris, who listens to Arab dance songs or to Spanish monks as he drives some Ukrainian tourists to their hotel, have been brought forth in order to describe this breakdown. Closer to home, I could offer the example of an ethnic Greek with Canadian citizenship, who teaches Orthodox theology in Wales, in English. But although this paradigm certainly negates the fairly recent concept or perhaps illusion of the nation-state, it is not without precedent. The case of St. Paul, a Greek-speaking Roman citizen and heir of the Hebrew theological tradition who travelled extensively throughout the multicultural Roman Empire, and became "everything to everyone" on the way, does not strike us as very different from the case of the American taxi-driver in Paris, at least from a cultural perspective.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the postmodern globalized world is perhaps not what we expected a few decades ago, when the unification of Europe was more of a vision than a bureaucratic ordeal, and we had not realized how closely we may be treading to one more clash of civilizations. Whether the theory about the rift across civilizations or religious groups is true in Huntington's view or even not exactly in the terms in which he expressed it, it is certainly nothing that we have not seen or faced before.

There are a few more things that are associated with what is referred to as 'the postmodern condition', that are perhaps of more interest to the Church: one of them is the

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1 Yet is clearly reflected in postmodern theory, cf. for instance Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, University of Minnesota, 1984, especially the appendix titled Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?, pp. 71-84.

2 Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos, *Art as Theology: from the Postmodern to the Medieval*, Equinox, 2007, p. 5.

'collapse of the grand narratives'<sup>3</sup>. This is something to which we need to pay a little closer attention.

The 'collapse of the grand narratives' is a term introduced in critical studies, which expresses the withdrawal of the idea of a single central ideology that was used in order to interpret history and culture, almost always with an eschatological "unitary end of history". Such grand narratives in the near past were Marxism - or the belief in an economic process that dictates historical necessities; the domination or privileged position of one culture or nation - such as the tendency to read the history of civilizations from the point of view of the development of ideas as they originate in the Greco-Roman world, evolve through the Middle Ages and the Reformation and end in our 'civilized' modern society; and even belief in a future where peace, economy and social sensitivities are guaranteed by scientific and technological achievements. In addition to such 'narratives', religion can be problematic, and has been identified as such from the postmodern perspective, as one more self-regulating, self-referential narrative, which perhaps more than others, can base its existence on a claim for absolute truth, and with a very distinct eschatological vision that from a certain point of view does not look too different from the vision of the ideologically motivated grand narratives. This is where it gets relevant for us - although for some philosophers the somewhat closed, self-referential nature of religion means that it may not be criticized by outsiders, at the expense however, of its rational separation from all other aspects of life (a stance usually known as Wittgensteinian fideism).

The postmodern critique on the absolute claims of the truth that have been expressed in religious practices and traditions, points to a. the fact that they have all laid some claim to the truth, yet all these claims cannot be simultaneously true, b. the necessity to place all religious traditions in a relativized, all-inclusive framework which takes some distance from all of them, and suggests a move from theology to religious studies as sociology, similar to the move from history to historiography.

In addition, this critique has to do with an unfortunate past practice of cultural imperialism that was exercised through missionary work for too long, such as the Portuguese Jesuit expeditions in Ethiopia and India in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which threatened some of the most ancient surviving Christian traditions. Although this is not something that may be applied to all Christian missionary activities, or at least not to the same extent and in the same way, this cultural imperialism, this kind of 'sin' of the past is widely regretted by all Christians, and has taught us a lot about mission and culture.

The main thrust behind the open or veiled opposition of Christianity by postmodernity and the politics of globalization however, is the question of the Truth, which for us may not be reduced to a relativist agnosticism. However, what we may discover if we examine more closely some of the origins of the postmodern critical directions is that most of its opposition to what it perceives as religion, is consistent with many of the concerns we ourselves have about the Truth, the Church, or Christian eschatology.

To approach this problem from the other side, our own attempt to understand the problematics of Truth, Church and Eschatology from the point of view of traditional Christianity, can lead us to similar apprehensions. Saints and theologians, in all generations, have warned us against any Christian version of idolatry. I am not talking about the cult of icons, statues or relics, but about the root of the word εἰδωλον, which is related to εἰδέναι (to know) and to ἰδέα (idea). Εἰδωλον and idolatry refer to the worship of our own idea or projection of what God is, and not to God himself; they refer to the confusion between a God who cannot even be limited by a name, to an abstraction where the Godhead as a

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3 Lyotard, *ibid.*

summum bonum is an epagogic reflection of what is down below, instead of a shadow of what is up above. This is a recurrent trap in theology: the much-discussed notion of the 'apophatic' in Patristic literature is connected with the discussion of the most important themes in Christian theology, and as such it may be approached from several systematic viewpoints, but perhaps the simplest and most effective way to understand it, is to see that it expresses the distance between that part of the divinity which is offered to us, through revelation, scripture or through the sacramental life, and that which we are able to understand using our calculative faculty and put to words. We name and we define what we possess intellectually, but in the case of divine matters we can place ourselves only at the receiving end of the dynamics of knowledge: the Church is primarily not a way for us to discover what God is, but a way for us to respond to him.

This 'ideological' version of God, which belongs to the historical world and the realm of the created, is, in a sense, 'fair game' for sociologists and social and philosophical critics: as an idea it belongs to the world of ideas - not the Platonic one, but the world of philosophical and rational discourse. However, the importance of the distinction between an uncreated and a created understanding of God, shows why most of Christian doctrine is engaged with the distinction between the created and the uncreated.

In this context, the problem with the concepts I mentioned previously, Truth and Church, is that they cannot be enclosed in an inert, static definition - it is extremely dangerous to reify them in our systematic exposition or in our practice, and if we could be allowed to take this one step further, it would be misleading to consider Wisdom, Truth or Church separated from the person of Christ. Rather than signifying a specific object, they point to a way of existing, and to a continuous, living, dynamic way of being. The very words αλήθεια and εκκλησία (truth and church), as well as the word ελευθερία (freedom) in their etymology and first context even before Christianity, are understood in the context of a process of coming together and constituting a community, but not for any reason: the Athenian εκκλησία του δήμου, the general assembly of the free citizens, was convened, or rather as the word εκκλησία (ἐκκλησι - καλῶ) suggests, they were called together for a specific reason: in order to define the truth, the non-forgetfulness, or in the context of pre-Socratic thought, to touch on the κοινός λόγος, the common logos that permeates everything, it is not usually perceived by us. In addition, freedom (ελευθερία - a word that is etymologically connected with the past perfect of the verb 'to come', ἐλήλυθα) was understood in this context as the ability to come into the εκκλησία and to partake of the common logos and the truth.

What does all this have to do with the politics of globalization? A very brief, superficial examination of these words shows us what the overwhelming evidence since the apostolic era has also shown us continuously, in many occasions where the Truth and the Praxis of the Church were compared and contrasted with the words (doctrines, teachings or kerygmata) that surround and protect it: that Christianity is not an ideological construction with doctrines in the place of a subscribing constitution or philosophical axioms, and it should not be regarded as such. Doctrines, teachings, creeds and affirmations at best surround the living Truth in order to protect it, and at worst they are confused with it. The reification of Truth and Church is something more problematic for us than it is for social scientists. Moreover, the collapse of the grand narratives, or the deconstructive phase of postmodernism, express a strong distrust to the noesiarchic academic edifice of self-referential axioms that claim to usurp the position of the Truth.

This, at a first reading, is something we should be thankful for. The same kind of distrust has been repeatedly expressed by the Church over the centuries, and although this wave of criticism does not originate, strictly speaking, from within the Church, the

acknowledgment of the distance between the discourse surrounding the Truth and the Truth itself - which for Christians is a person, the hypostasized Truth in Jesus Christ - is something so consistent with the theological struggles of the Church, that we may perhaps detect in it the touch of the Holy Spirit.

The same may be said about globalization, as an attempt to rise above local cultures. Although it is primarily motivated by the mechanism of politics, finances, lifestyle and worldwide media, ecumenicity or 'strength in difference' has been one of the constant ecclesiological demands of the early Church. To remember only one of the several early sources that give us an understanding of the Church in this way, we can read the passage in the Didache, which refers to the Eucharistic bread: *As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.*<sup>4</sup> But even if we do not debate the finer points of this inclusive ecclesiology, the Church has repeatedly condemned ethnophyletism as a heresy. Nevertheless, our practice, and this is something we can say to varying degrees for all denominations, is not always very consistent with this view. Speaking for the Orthodox Church, although this is something that has been condemned in the Greek and in the Russian tradition, the political history of the last two or three centuries in Eastern Europe was, and still is, motivated to a confounding degree, by the self-identification of a people on the basis of ethnic, racial or cultural identity. Thus, the struggle against this problem has been an uphill battle.

This problem has been transplanted in the immigrant communities of the Orthodox Diaspora, which often had to exercise an even more centripetal policy, as they were trying to maintain their cultural and linguistic tradition, along with their religious tradition. While it is understandable and even desirable, under certain circumstances, for immigrant communities to preserve their distinctiveness in order to offer it to the larger community they call their home, the zeal of heritage preservation is often difficult to tell apart from fundamentalist fanaticism.

But then, the question that arises is, if we do not try to define the truth, but only to live according to the truth and with the truth, what are the constants that guide us in this process? The direct answer to this from within the Church would usually have to do with the liturgical and sacramental meeting of humanity with the eternal Truth of Christ and its manifestation as a praxis, pragma or event that has more dimensions than a learned philosophical tradition, but in order to unpack this question in the context of the Tradition and Transmission of the Truth, I'll return to the definition of the Athenian Εκκλησία του Δήμου as the community that gathered in the name and for the pursuit of the Truth.

It is perhaps not difficult to understand the definition of truth according to a community, and even to place next to it the concept of the 'sacred', even without yet a religious connotation. The ancient Athenians used to refer to the hill of the Acropolis as the Sacred Rock, the 'ἱερός βράχος', because it defined the centre of the polis, the point of reference for their entire communal existence. Sociology, likewise, can help us find such central poles in ancient, medieval and modern communities and institutions. The sacred and the profane can easily be defined, in this way, in sociological terms, and the truth of the communal existence is the truth that is produced by or rather flows from the sum of the parts and their synthesis into something larger. But community in the understanding of the Church is something that may be seen not only across space, but also across time. While it may be easy to poke holes at the classic definition of the Holy Tradition by Vincent of Lerins, as that which has been believed "everywhere, always and by all", we cannot help

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<sup>4</sup> Didache 9:8.

but notice how the convergence of "everywhere and by all" is completed by the "always" - although in contrast at least in a cultural, philosophical or technological tradition one would wish to see a development over time. This understanding of community as a convergence or a 'coming together' over time, which joins the past, the present, the future, and, more important, the eschata, is also something that can help us understand, as much as this is possible, the field of action, as it were, of the Holy Spirit. And although the truth remains the same everywhere and always, it is we who enter into a continuous process of approaching it, with the grace of God.

Since it is a process we refer to, and at this stage I do not mean the process from the being to the becoming or from the fallen world to the Kingdom of Heaven at the end of time, it is to the process the transmission of the truth of the Church that we need to turn our attention. This is the 'apostolicity' of the Church, a notion more complex than we usually take it to be.

One characteristic of the Church, which we affirm in the Creed, is that in addition to 'One, Holy, and Catholic', it is also 'Apostolic'. This 'Apostolic' means, at a first level, two different things.

First, it signifies our connection with the received tradition, as it was given to us by the apostles of Christ and their successors. By this we acknowledge that what we believe, what we practice and what we do in the Church, we have received from not just the Apostles or Christ himself two thousand years ago, but by the countless cloud of saints who received the tradition before them and passed it to the next generation, to use a liturgical expression, our Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, and Ascetics.

This is an interesting point: why is it repeatedly in many early Christian texts, such as the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and Irenaeus' *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, that, regardless of who were the actual writers of some of these texts, our ecclesiastical tradition identifies the nature of the Holy Tradition, and also its own origin with the Apostles of Christ, instead with Christ himself? Is it, after all, not Christ, who is the head and the founder of the Church? Why is it necessary to state, as the *Didache* does, that this is the teaching of the Lord to the nations *through the twelve Apostles*?

In a certain understanding of Trinitarian theology, the notion of the divine Tradition is already present within the Holy Trinity and in the person of the Son, who, for instance, in John 10 explains that he received the command to lay down his life, from the Father. Christ often makes this referential relationship with the Father very clear - he is, in fact the Son of the Father, because he receives everything from him, and he refers everything back to him. Nevertheless, to bring this into the human realm, our ecclesiological understanding of coming together not just responding to the call of Christ, but in order to become the body of Christ, begins with the Apostles.

On the same wavelength as it were, the expression 'apostolic' is associated with a perhaps more focused or more specific aspect of tradition. While the concept of 'Apostolic succession' implies a Eucharistic backbone in the Tradition of the Church, it also connects the sacramental tradition and the origin of the Eucharistic body of Christ, with the Apostles. Something that needs to be understood is that apostolic succession is not the line that connects the bishops as gifted persons or persons who were given their ministry, to the apostles. It is, instead, the line that connects all the Orthodox Eucharistic communities everywhere and at all times, to the community of the Apostles. This may be seen in that a deacon, priest or bishop may be ordained only during the Divine Liturgy: it is when the bishop exercises his ministry and his authority as the president of the Eucharist, in the midst

of and with the participation of the people (who may block the ordination), that he can ordain according to apostolic succession. If apostolic succession were something that applied to him as a person, if it implied a level of authority that was given to the bishop as a personal gift of the Holy Spirit, he would be able to perform ordinations at any point, during and also outside the Divine Liturgy.<sup>5</sup>

But even if we do not delve deeper into the nuances of the Tradition, understood in a Trinitarian, Christological, Eucharistic or ecclesiological way, we can at least surmise from all this that the first way to understand the expression Apostolic, has to do with the past that is entrusted to us, and with the sum of the Holy Tradition. The second way to understand 'Apostolic' has to do with the future. The word 'apostle' itself means the one who is 'sent forth', who is sent out for a reason. This reason is mission. In fact, the words mission and missionary in Greek are *ιεραποστολή* and *ιεραπόστολος*, the 'ιερός' or 'sacred' that is added to the word Apostle, having the effect of taking it one notch down, in relation to the Apostles of Christ, consistently with a certain inflation of Church titles, where we can see that a Constantinopolitan Patriarch for instance, may be addressed as 'His All-Holiness' while he is alive, but after his death, and only if the Church recognizes him as a saint, his title may be 'demoted' to simply 'saint'.

But the reason I dedicated a few lines to the concept of the apostolic as something that connects us with the past, is because it is in this background that we can appreciate what it means for the future, for spreading further the Christian Church, and for mission work. There is nothing really new that we ourselves can bring to the tradition, other than our own selves. Yet, to offer oneself to the tradition is not the same as to try to change the system 'from the inside', that is, to approach it with an agenda. Zisimos Lorentzatos, one of Yannaras's major influences, described once this offering of the self to the Tradition for Yannaras, comparing it to the way the dead body offers itself to be washed without any resistance, as it is being prepared for the funeral. And thus, the first reason as to why we understand the apostolic role of the Church as missionary, and as a projection into the future, is because this is exactly how we have received it from the past. It is the nature of the Church to be given, to be transmitted and to be offered, and it is this process, which does not flow from a person or authority other than that of Christ, in the way we understand him historically, ecclesologically and eschatologically, that allows it to transcend the authority or the seal of any given time and person. In other words, the main thing to see in the discussion of the 'apostolicity' of the Church is to respond to the question 'why do we do missionary work?' The answer that we can come up with is 'because this is not just what the Church does: this is, at least in part, what the Church *is*.' This dimension of the Church as mission, and its connection with the experience of the Truth in the Church can be seen in the confession of faith that Peter and John gave in Acts 4:20, after they were commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop teaching about Jesus: "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard", and as John adds in 1 John 1:1 "and that which our hands have touched".

In the present age, this missionary aspect of the Church is experienced in at least three ways. First, there is what we could call 'internal mission'. This is the kerygmatic work of the Church, the much necessary 'preaching to the converted' or continuous catechesis and teaching within the services. This is a valid observation for all Christian churches, everywhere, yet in this understanding of missionary work, it is important, as Metropolitan John of Pergamos has repeatedly stressed, that it is not raised as one characteristic that is more important than the other aspects of the work of the Church, and it is not allowed to define what the Church is.

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5 Cf. Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Ευχαριστίας Εξεμπόριον*, Megara, 2006, pp.51-52.

Second, there is the mission in a non-Christian or an unchurched land. The politics of globalization which demand that we treat any indigenous culture and religious tradition very delicately and respectfully, can only be consistent with the true character of missionary work. Simply put, we evangelize and teach by example and not by ideological confrontation. We show, but we do not try to convince. We listen and help, maintaining our mind, our heart and our inspiration in heaven, we do not manipulate.

The third way of missionary work is more difficult to address. As in the case of our missionary Orthodox Church in Wales,<sup>6</sup> it is possible to talk about missionary activity in a Christian land. However, if we do not want to look at the Apostolic Church as an ideological or cultural edifice which engages in an ideological warfare, and if we want to maintain that interdenominational dialogue is something we take seriously, how is it possible to explain and justify such missionary work? Are we not wolves in sheep's clothing?

The answer cannot be simple. Missions in Christian lands have accumulated too many sins and have generated too many controversies over the centuries, and it is probably not prudent to dismiss completely practices such as the aforementioned Jesuit missionary imperialism as a mistake of the past that we are in no danger of repeating. Similarly, the question of the Uniates, or Byzantine-rite Catholics in Eastern Europe and also America, is still a difficult and complex area of conflict between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. This is a difficulty that I would like to address in several levels.

The first thing that needs to be said about this is that it is increasingly hard to talk about a predominant denomination, and sometimes even a predominant religion, in the Western world. It is certainly true that the history of the Anglican Church is more closely connected with Britain than any other denomination and it enjoys a special place in its formal connection with the state. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church in Britain may not really be thought of as of lesser historical standing. As for the Orthodox Church, while it may be true that it is an Eastern import, a brief examination of the ethnic background of its current priests shows that it is not fair to think of it as an immigrant Church anymore: the 2008 calendar of the Archdiocese of Thyateira lists 72 priests and deacons of Greek extraction in its ranks, and 40 of English extraction - at least if we go by their last names. In the Russian Churches this changes to 12 priests of Russian extraction, versus 38 of English extraction, and in the Antiochian Church this analogy becomes 2 Arab priests and 13 English. Certainly this does not reflect the composition of an immigrant Church. It may be said then, although I do not wish to push this argument too far, that although there is a distinct Christian seal in the identity of the British people, the question as to how exactly this translates into a unified ecclesial body, is not quite settled.

But to return to the question of mission in a Christian land, on a first reading, this type of missionary work is something of a combination of the two first types I mentioned. Most Orthodox converts in Britain or in North America, to restrict myself to examples I know from direct experience, have often followed a trajectory that allowed them to reach the Orthodox Church not so much as a reaction to their former Christian background, but mostly as its fulfilment. Many of them found in the Orthodox Church the completion of the Christian schooling, as it were, that they received elsewhere. No doubt, this is a stream that flows both ways, but the first thing that we have to look for, if this is truly the case, is a harmonious and constructive collaboration with the local Christian Church, as much as this is possible. The bulk of this kind of missionary work has to do with people who are, to bring back the examples I used earlier, partly in the choir, and also partly unchurched.

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<sup>6</sup> I refer to an Orthodox mission in Lampeter, Wales, founded in 2006.



Bearing this in mind, there is very little that we have done in the Orthodox mission in Lampeter in public, without the collaboration of the local Anglican Church. In our case, as well as in many similar cases, these converts are people who would be otherwise lost from the 'Christian family' altogether. I believe the understanding of the Anglican chaplain in Lampeter who was very happy and supportive when we set out to organize the local Orthodox Church, is that we fight the fight that he could not fight himself. In the same vein, the local Orthodox priest, Fr. Timothy Pearce, who is a Welshman himself, once explained to me his motivation to bring Orthodoxy to his compatriots in these words: "The Welsh are essentially still a pagan people. Anglicanism has had a very difficult and tortured life in Wales, because it was difficult to separate itself from the English-Welsh political tensions, and the Roman Catholic Church never managed to take root here, or rather to hold its fort. Most non-conformist churches disappeared into nothingness. Perhaps what can lead my fellow people to Christ is the Orthodox Church". One can clearly see the 'ecumenical' dimension of Fr. Timothy's approach.

This allows me to say something about the ecumenical, according to one understanding of the term, dimension of missionary work in a Christian land. But before I proceed with this, I would like to contextualize our ecumenical or rather our interdenominational dialogue. As several failed attempts in the past have shown, it is very early to consider ecumenism in the context of a sacramental union and intercommunion. For the Orthodox Church this would not be a means to encourage an administrative union, but the very end of any ecumenical hope. However, I believe that an honest examination of each other's theological thought, practice and sensitivities can prepare the way and achieve a solid framework for a time in the future when we may be ready for an ecumenical dialogue with that goal. Until that happens, to return to the ecumenical dimension of mission, we can only benefit from seeing each other in action, in practice, where our entire range of theology, goals, methods and even problems is laid out for everyone to see, and contributes something in the range of the Christian *event*.

Yet, for a truly ecumenical dialogue to have any hope of progressing, the central question of 'what is the Church' needs to be addressed, in a way that recognizes, to begin with, that we do not start from what is common to us. This is the question that, more than any others, is in the heart of missionary work and of ecumenical dialogue. In the context of the globalized world, if I may be permitted to use this expression, in addition to any purely theological questions that arise among us, the question also brings to the foreground the difficulty of the connection between local cultures with a central authority, and in the end what is really that which holds them together in one Church or one communion. This is an interesting question for all of us together, but also separately for different reasons for the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox and the Anglicans, and the dynamics of the autonomization of local cultures against the globalized framework makes it more relevant now than it was one or two centuries ago. In the end, the apostolic nature of the Church (that is, the Church as a continuous mission), engenders the pursuit of a theologically solid and effective ecclesiology as the main theoretical concern of missiology. The connection or identity of the local Churches with the One, Holy and Apostolic Church is now as challenging an issue as it was in early Christianity.

I am speaking, of course, about synodality or conciliarity and primacy. And although the question is too big to address in a single presentation, let alone in a section of a presentation, I cannot help but observe that the financial nature of globalization as the main international centripetal force, and the postmodernist centrifugal justification of an autonomization or disestablishment of local cultures, provide a conducive framework for a Church that acts with the reflexes of ideological movements.

In contrast, most of the experience we can bring to the question of the local variation and the central authority from the experience of the early Church, shows a different direction than that of the 'soft' dialogue and the need for consensus. Or, to put this slightly differently, in Church politics, unlike in secular politics, it is hopeless to try to build the connection between the local and the central based on what they have in common. Instead, a connection that starts by addressing the deepest differences has more chances of producing a stable effect. Let me offer an imaginary example, in order to make myself clearer:

Possibility one: The year is 2030. Through an increasingly successful interdenominational dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, a respectable portion of Catholic and Orthodox bishops and theologians, including the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople, decide that it is possible to find enough common ground in theological and administrative matters, and thus proceed to a formal intercommunion between the two Churches. The main contentious issue of the primacy of the Pope is addressed in a theological solution that satisfies to some extent both traditions.

Reaction: a split across both Churches. Athonite Orthodoxy and the Russian Church distance themselves from Constantinople. Within the Catholic Church some people start looking into provisions that would allow them to declare an Antipope. The unified Catholic-Orthodox Church convenes an Ecumenical Council to discuss the issue, but at the same time the Patriarch of Moscow convenes a Panorthodox council in Mt. Athos, which decides to break communion with the Uniate bishops.

Possibility two: After prolonged discussions between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox about what is the meaning of authority and servitude in the Church, and after they have come at an impasse, the Pope decides to put the message of Mark 10:43 ("whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant") to practice. He asks to meet with the Orthodox spiritual leader who resists ecumenical dialogue more vehemently, the abbot of the Esphigmenou monastery on Mt. Athos, and invites him to Rome. The abbot refuses. The Pope decides to visit Greece and Mt. Athos, but the Athonite monks refuse to allow him to enter the Holy Mountain as the self-declared primate of all Christianity. The pope then asks that he is admitted as a pilgrim for six months in a monastic cell in the Esphigmenou monastery. The monks agree, on the condition that he does not receive any visitors from outside the Holy Mountain, and that he is not allowed to take communion or to perform any priestly acts while he is there. The Pope agrees with their terms. At the end of the six months, although no theological dialogue has taken place, the Pope has gained a new understanding of the Orthodox resistance to the idea of the Universal Pontiff, while the Athonite monks have been overwhelmed by this unprecedented act of humility, and have gained respect and trust in the bishop of Rome. The ecumenical dialogue on the union of the Churches can now begin.

I will admit that this romantic consideration of future possibilities is just that. But what I hope I demonstrated by this fantasy is the difference between an ideological and an ecclesiological approach. The first example I offered reflects practices that happen too often, between Church bodies and also within them - not, as I have already stated, that I do not believe in ecumenical dialogue, but I believe that it is not enough. Although the mechanisms of negotiation and vote of majority are valid and desirable in our political system, they are certainly not enough in the Church. To exacerbate this point even further, we can find precedents in the Church where the entire Truth of the Church is not saved in a social or political structure of this nature, but in something that flies in the face of any reasonable projection - thus reminding us the observation of Fr. George Florovsky, who noted that the history of the Church is so unpredictable in the light of the operation of the

Holy Spirit, that it is nothing less than 'chaotic'. The cases of St. Athanasios the Great and St. Maximos the Confessor, who alone saved the Truth of the Church for some time, are a complete paradox in the context of the paradigm of social consensus, and a testing case for any definition of the Church.

But here is exactly the challenge we face at every level of authority within the Church. The postmodern world has discovered that a central top-down authority backed by what Althusser called an 'ideological state apparatus' cannot survive. Likewise, the ecumenical situation shows that a loose confederation of theological trends that are bound by a romantic but not substantial enough commitment to the idea of conciliarity, cannot be defined as the Body of Christ. What is then, or rather what can be the Ecclesiology of the Apostolic Church in the era of globalization?

In some ways it is easier for us to have a mental image of the Ecclesiology of the Apostolic Tradition, in the present age which questions the validity or rather the actual existence of a centre-over-periphery structure. While the visible structure of the Church, with bishops, priests, deacons, etc. is necessary for the Orthodox Church, this is not understood in a vertical, administrative way, since Christ is eschatologically 'all and in all'. The approval of the people is necessary at every level of authority in the Church, having been able to reverse Church Councils and episcopal decisions in the past. The bishop grants his authority to his presbyters who represent him, but he also receives his own authority from them, being the expression and the servant of their unity. Although this is not something enforced as much as it should, the bishop is often directed by several canons to act with the consultation and the acquiescence of his presbyters for several important decisions. As Ignatios of Antioch expressed this relationship wonderfully, "the presbyters are connected to the bishop as the strings are to a harp, in such a way that in their concord and their consonant love, Jesus Christ is sung".<sup>7</sup> In a similar way this may also be seen at the level of the parish, where the priest, locum tenens of the bishop, as the bishop is locum tenens of Christ, acts as the liturgical focus in the place of Christ in the Kingdom, but he does so based on the authority of his bishop, and also on the active acceptance and participation of the lay members of the local community.

This can also be seen at the universal level, where all Orthodox bishops are liturgically equal to each other, and every local Church is the complete Catholic Church. This is of fundamental importance in Orthodox Ecclesiology: that every complete local Orthodox Church is the Catholic Church, consubstantial to all other local Orthodox Churches, and in this way the same as the Ecumenical Catholic Church. This is a view that we see as early as the second century with Ignatios of Antioch, but it permeates the Ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church in its every expression since then. This is a view that in a sense follows naturally from the belief in the real presence of Christ, in the Eucharistic/sacramental or in any other sense. For the Orthodox Church this is clearly understood in connection with the Eucharist, which for us is the union of the divine in a way according to which the mutual indwelling, the perichoresis of the local and the universal, as, to some other degree also the perichoresis of the individual and the communal, works both ways. According to the way we understand the term 'Catholic Church', every local Church is part of the universal Church, but at the same time the universal Church is also contained perichoretically in every local Church.

This means that the control from the visible centre or centres of the Orthodox world is the same as the control of the periphery towards the centre. Since it is recognized that the experience of the Church and the presence of Christ is, essentially, the same

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to Ephesians, 4.

wherever it takes place, and since every bishop is liturgically equal to every other bishop, the conciliar structure of the Church operates in a way that allows the presidents of the local Eucharistic communities to measure to each other's experience. The role of the primus of the autonomous, the autocephalous or the ecumenical Orthodox Church, is to safeguard this sharing of their Eucharist-based experience in his entire area of responsibility, so that any problems or differences between the Churches are addressed by their intercommunication and their mutual indwelling. In other words, there is no vertical authoritarian imposition from the top to the bottom, but on the other hand the strong value that the Orthodox Church places in the belief of the One Church and of the consubstantiality of the local and the universal Churches discourages the break of community from one part of the Church. Whenever schisms have taken place in the history of the Church, including recent difficult cases, they were seen as anomalies that should be corrected in due time (and very often were), and not as the 'right' of an individual administration to take its own way. But despite several difficulties between the local Churches, in matters such as jurisdictions, administrative differences, liturgical practices, and so on, the independence of the local bishops is such that ecclesiastical intrusion is not tolerated. For matters other than matters of faith, not even the Patriarch of Constantinople has the right to intervene in an internal administrative matter of a diocese, even of a diocese that recognizes its spiritual dependence on Constantinople, and not Alexandria, Jerusalem, or elsewhere.

The same perichoretic model applies, to some degree, at the level of the parish and the individual, although it is true that most writers who have approached Orthodox ecclesiology, have done so mostly at the level of the diocese and not at the level of the parish or the individual members. Without trying to get to that problem at present, what is perhaps a safe guide, based on the experience of the Church and on the reflections of the Fathers, is that the Church works in a way that 'all is in all', and while it is possible for a faithful to exist as a full and constituent member of the Church, it is also possible for the entire Church to exist within an individual. This sounds like a paradox, because 'Church' means necessarily 'communion', and the ecclesiastical being is defined by the way of relation to the other, than by anything else. Nevertheless, one of the several possible ways to understand what a saint is, which I think is one of the most complete approximations of sanctity, refers to a person who has internalized the love of the others and the love of God - the two laws on which all other laws hang - to such a degree, that he has already loved and accepted every human, every unavoidable possibility of the human condition, even the most sinful ones - although not sin itself - and has tried to address it in Christ. The saint, according to this understanding, is someone who has internalized the entire Church inside him, or rather the entire world as a Church, and is not therefore a sign of individual piety or justification, but a sign of the individual being offered completely to the Church, preserving the entire image of the Church as a network of relationships that promote, through every layer, the coming of Christ as "all in all", inside him.

We can have a complete image of the Church when every member of a parish offers himself to the community and becomes Christ-ed sacramentally, through the operation of the Holy Spirit (something that although is securely connected with the Eucharist, it is not restricted in it alone), and when every parish and diocese recognizes its own Christly presence and experience as inseparable from the Christly presence of the other parishes and dioceses. In comparison, the image of the Church as we experience it is certainly an image of struggle, a dynamic image, an image of the militant Church. Yet, we prefigure the Kingdom of God liturgically, and we envision this 'all in all' in the Eucharist. The illuminating rays of God reach through the entire Church, and their power is everywhere the same, regardless of whether they are closer to the top or the bottom of the Ecclesiastical hierarchy. This may be seen at the liturgical level in a very interesting way:

as Metropolitan John Zizioulas, perhaps the main proponent of the Eucharist-centred ecclesiology today observes, after the consecration and the change of the bread and wine into the body and the blood of Christ, the divisions among ecclesiastical ranks become meaningless, and the bishop normally has to receive communion from a deacon or a priest, and not by himself, before he administers it to the presbyters and the deacons.

I am afraid that while I have discussed the question of apostolic ecclesiology in the postmodern world, I do not know that there is a final and satisfactory answer. And while I discussed the apostolicity of the Church in order to stress, in this case not so much its origin and its connection with Tradition, but rather its tendency to exist and grow as a living organism instead of as an idea, and while I welcome the difficulties that the present age is inflicting on our self-understanding, making it necessary for us to think more clearly in terms of our missiology and ecclesiology, I am afraid that the best I can do is just point to ecclesiology as the area that can allow us to turn a crisis into an opportunity for spiritual growth. We know that there is no real definition of the Church in the early Church or in the Fathers - at least not much more than in the ecclesiology of St. Paul - and this shows that the issue is quite complex. It is certainly necessary to wonder what we mean by 'Church' before we embark in missionary work and in ecumenical dialogue.

At the level of sacramental and theological thought, which is, at least for the Orthodox, a good way to start since for Nicholas Cabasilas "the Church is manifested in its sacrament",<sup>8</sup> we can see that the Church is a continuous process of synthesis, where what is partial is joined to Christ and thus to everything else, maintaining its distinctiveness. This is done, as Metropolitan John Zizioulas who is the basic proponent of Orthodox Eucharistic Ecclesiology at present reads the early Fathers, in a way in which the Eucharistic Catholicity of the Church is expressed at the same time at the local and at the universal level - without a reference to the Universal the local is not truly Catholic, but at the same time the Universal is not truly Catholic either, if it does not consist of complete local Catholic Churches either.

Yet it has to be very clear that the Eucharist is not seen as simply as a ritual that cleans and joins us with the divine by the power of the ritual alone. The Eucharistic ecclesiology of Metropolitan John has been criticized as bordering a theology of 'Eucharistic pagans' in the way some people have read him, because sometimes it is hard to see the boundaries of the Church according to it, outside the Eucharistic act. Yet, I am convinced that Metropolitan John sees the Eucharist not so much as that which 'makes' the Church in a causal sense, as that which serves as the focus of the various aspects of the Church, including the way of private prayer and meditation. Metropolitan John has repeatedly expressed the view that the Eucharist can be seen not as the only constituent element of the Church, but as the element that brings all the other spheres of Church activity (such as the confessional or doctrinal aspect, the missionary, kerygmatic work, piety and morality) into focus. It is very clear in his writings that the Church is the Church not just inside but also outside the Eucharist, but only because it is the Church inside the Eucharist.

This understanding of Eucharistic ecclesiology, which can be understood only as an ecclesiology deeply grounded in eschatology, provides a basis for the relation of the partial and local to the whole and universal, in a way that reminds one the mechanics of a hologram, every part of which contains the image of the whole object. It may take some time, but I believe that postmodern metaphysics may discover, in front of it, the reverse existentialism which makes complete the local and the universal simultaneously.

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<sup>8</sup> *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 38:6, 39:1.

**Андреас Андреопулос**

**СИНОДАЛНОСТ И ПОМЕСНЕ ЦРКВЕ.  
ЕКЛИСИОЛОГИЈА АПОСТОЛСКЕ ЦРКВЕ У ЕРИ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИЈЕ**

Чланак се бави местом Православне цркве у глобалном друштву. Потврђено је да неке од уобичајених области критике религије унутар постмодерног дискурса такође могу бити примењене унутар православног богословља (као у случају постварења, опредмећења, реификације Истине и Цркве). Апостолска, предањска и мисионарска димензија Цркве поново је афирмисана унутар плуралистичког и глобалног друштва. Перихоретски модел православне еклисиологије развијен је до одређене мере и у односу на њега показано је како постмодерни критицизам може имати здрав, иако испитивачки, утицај на предањску еклисиологију.