

## SYNOD AND 'SYNODALITY'

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Just as the 20<sup>th</sup> century has rightfully been characterised as 'the century of the Church', given that it was the century in which the ecumenical movement was established and developed worldwide among 'divided Christians', it would be a blessing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century also soon to emerge and be named 'the century of the SYNOD and SYNODALITY.'

For, we must confess that, in spite of the indisputable opportunities afforded by the ecumenical movement for 'divided Christians' to come to know each other better and be appreciated accordingly, the fact remains that it was not possible for great advancements to occur in terms of the much-sought unity and reconciliation; a sad reality that even the most enthusiastic ecumenists acknowledged with all sincerity, on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the organisation called the World Council of Churches.

The main reason for which substantial progress was not achieved, in terms of unity among 'Christian Churches' or 'Denominations' (and much less the peace that ought to prevail also with any other religions and ideologies), is that the most sacred institution of the *Synod*, as handed down to us through the Acts of the Apostles, took very little time to degenerate within the local Churches. This occurred to such an extent that, instead of a spirit of humility and solidarity, new schisms were 'institutionalised' and sterile disputes were 'nurtured', which had no relation to people's life (neither in this one nor in the next!). This is why 'vigilant' Christians at least – both Clergy and lay – had to focus attention upon the inviolable sanctity and the irreplaceable necessity of the institution of the *Synod*, which alone enables the cultivation of the spirit of brotherly 'solidarity' and 'collegiality' within any field of human 'co-existence' and 'co-operation' in this world.

May we take this opportunity to recall that all of the author's postgraduate and postdoctoral publications looked towards one single goal: to ascertain in an 'hierarchical', that is, pneumatological (!) evaluation, the causes for which – for two entire millennia (!) – neither the teachings of the Incarnate Christ were able to reach fruition for all people, nor were the 'illuminations' of the Paraclete at least verifiable in every instance, amidst the continually propagated and prolonged chaos of the human condition, in all areas of renowned 'Christian Civilisation'!

In the persistent search for the 'causes' on account of which Christian Civilization was unable to bear fruits corresponding to the proclamation (*kerygma*) and 'bloodshed' of the multifarious Martyrs of the Faith, the author at a very early stage felt the need to 'steer a steady course' towards the stated goal, and as evidence of this presents below at least several representative samples of extensive monographs and special studies on the topic:

(a) His Doctoral Dissertation at the Theological School of the University of Athens (Σ. Σ. Χαρκιαννάκη, *ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟ ΑΛΛΟΗΤΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΩ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, Athens 1965). It is worth noting that the translation of this work into English by P. Kariatlis has only this year been jointly published by ATF Press (of the Australasian Theological Forum) and St Andrew's Orthodox Press (Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, Adelaide and Sydney, 2008).

(b) The monograph concerning all the proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Upsala, Sweden, 1968. It was during this Assembly that the Orthodox delegation (large for the first time) succeeded in broadening the Basis Article of the Constitution for those who wished to participate in the World Council of Churches from a simply 'Christological' to an authentic and explicit 'Trinitarian' Confession (Σ.Σ. Χαρκιαννάκη, Η Δ' ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΣΥΝΕΛΕΥΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΓΚΟΣΜΙΟΥ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟΥ ΤΩΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΩΝ, ΟΥΨΑΛΑ ΣΟΥΗΔΙΑΣ 1968 [*The 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches - Upsala, Sweden 1968*], Thessaloniki 1969).

- (c) His Postdoctoral Dissertation at the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki (Σ.Σ. Χαρκιανάκη, ΤΟ ΠΕΡΙΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ ΤΗΣ Β' ΒΑΤΙΚΑΝΗΣ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΥ [*The Constitution on the Church of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council*] Thessaloniki, (1969), the significance of which with regard to the contentious topic of the institution of the Synod, was officially recognised not only within the ambit of sincere and modern Ecumenism, but also by the Roman Catholic Church itself.
- (d) The same *leitmotif* ran through the special classes of Comparative Ecclesiology that the author gave as visiting Professor in 1973 at the Faculty of Systematic Theology in the Roman Catholic School of Regensburg University (Bavaria), which Professor Joseph Ratzinger (as he was known at that time, now Pope Benedict XVI) had arranged to be published as a book, including indeed his own enthusiastic Prologue (St. Charkianakis *Orthodoxe Kirche und Katholizismus: Ähnliches u. Verschiedenes* [*The Orthodox Church and Catholicism: Differences and Similarities*] Kosel-Verlag, München 1975). [This work was subsequently translated into English: *The Orthodox Church and Catholicism*, trans. H.L.N. Simmons, and published by the Australian Council of Churches, Sydney n.d.]
- (e) Yet also at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, established in 1986 in Sydney, the entire spiritual atmosphere reflects the same ecclesiological breadth, both in terms of the composition of the teaching staff, as well as in the various programs of study, not to mention its annual theological review published under the highly characteristic title 'PHRONEMA', which has been taken straight from the text of the New Testament, and especially from the Apostle Paul. It is at any rate quite clear that the 'unity' and 'catholicity' of the single identity of the whole people of God, which the institution of the 'Synod' is by definition called to serve (the term Synod being almost synonymous with 'Synagogue' and 'Ecclesia'), can only be sufficiently expressed through the term 'phronema'.

Therefore, it was only natural that, as the author is also a spiritual shepherd, the abovementioned precious ascertainments were presented

in his Pastoral Address to the 10th Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (27th-30th January 2008). Only in so doing, could he draw the necessary attention in the most formal way, before Clergy and lay people, to the obligation of restoring as soon as possible the irreplaceable and most sacred institution of the Synod, the smooth functioning of which determines the whole well-being of the Church, both as 'militant' in the world, and 'triumphant' in heaven. Here, then, is the extensive reference to the burning issue, delivered at the commencement of the 2008 Clergy-Laity Congress:

In his Pastoral Reports and Keynote Addresses up until 2003, the speaker considered it necessary to present formally and comment responsibly, every four years from the podium of the Congress, on the additional projects and institutions of the Archdiocese in the continually evolving network of the visible Body of our Church, from one end of this vast country of Australia to the other.

Corresponding commentary was also necessary regarding the changes in personnel (involving both clergy and lay people) within the many respective services, so as to publicly express to them the deserved praise of the Church, while at the same time always underlining the renewed solidarity of responsibility we share through our collaboration in Christ. Only in this way can the vital character of the Church as the Body of Christ be maintained, distinguishing it sharply from any other 'association' in secular terms.

Similarly, this is the only means of maintaining – amidst the sinful systems of the world – the God-given system of administration, that is the Church's 'form of government', which cannot be a monarchy, nor an oligarchy (in the sense of aristocracy), nor even renowned democracy (as the rule of the mob).

The only genuine form of government within the Church as 'life in the Holy Spirit' has been established once and for all from above, as a 'Structured Pneumatocracy', so that all members may indeed at all times act as a collegial multitude of brothers and sisters, while simultaneously 'giving preference to one another in honour' (Rom. 12:10). This very

characteristic notion and actualisation of 'Communion in the Holy Spirit', found its official expression from the time of the Apostles right up until today in the most sacred institution of the Synod, as this is understood in pure Orthodox Ecclesiology.

If the institution of the Synod is not respected with fear of God, both in terms of its structure as well as of its function (precisely as established by the teachings of the Apostles and Fathers with specific sacred Canons during the first Christian Millennium) then the whole teaching concerning the Church becomes falsified in its fundamental principles, in which case we no longer have pure Orthodox Ecclesiology, nor of course a Christian mode of living! Instead, we inevitably have creations of 'human conceptualisation', which we even dare to present as 'inspirations of the Holy Spirit', thereby becoming – perhaps unwittingly – 'deceivers and deceived' (2 Tim. 3:13).

The mentioned spiritual 'degeneration' which of course derives primarily from the impiety and hypocrisy of spiritual Shepherds, and moreover from Heads of local Churches, commences from the moment that uncanonical interventions, either from within or externally, are permitted in the composition and functioning of the Synod, regardless of whether this is an Episcopal, Diocesan, Regional, Patriarchal or Ecumenical Synod. It is extremely urgent and imperative for each of us to have a clear appreciation that the 'character' of the Synod, which is expressed authentically in the composition and functioning of the Synodal Body, is constant and given from above.

Consequently, whoever corrupts the representative instrument through which the communion in the Holy Spirit is expressed, that is the Synod, commits the greatest crime against the Church. For this reason, the verdict is immediate and non-negotiable, as expressed strikingly by the Apostle Paul in reference to the guilty: 'God will destroy him' (1 Cor. 3:17). Therefore a senior Synodal Body is not justified in arbitrarily interfering with the structure and function of a subordinate Synodal Body. That which the senior Synod is entitled to judge and evaluate in the Holy Spirit, is the work and the decisions of the subordinate Synod. In so doing,

both the 'structured Pneumatocracy' is saved and expressed in practice, as well as the solidarity of responsibility in Christ, first of the spiritual Leaders and, by extension, of all the faithful represented through them. If these fundamental and inviolable tenets are not upheld with religious devotion by those who share the 'first responsibility', then a Pandora's Box opens up, and nothing remains constant in order to 'orientate' the believers at least, on the path of salvation.

To make even clearer, in principle, the mentioned position of Orthodox theology concerning the non-negotiable value of the institution of the Synod, we have to unfortunately juxtapose several recent and highly provocative examples of tragic decline that we should avoid. These are taken not only from the area of the long-standing unaccountable Papism of Rome, but also from almost all those still celebrated Orthodox Churches around the world (be they Autocephalous, Autonomous, Semi-Autonomous or no less the simple Episcopal Eparchies!).

What follows is the most recent and self-contradicting example (!) of the Papocentrism of Rome. On the occasion of the recommencement of our official Theological Dialogue with Rome (that was ingloriously disrupted due to the Uniate problem) all who knew the situation from the inside were literally astonished by the ease with which the once renowned Doctrinal Theologian of the West, Cardinal Ratzinger, officially stated to the Orthodox – having become Pope Benedict XVI – that, yes, in the first common Christian Millennium the Bishop of Rome was the 'Patriarch of the West', as well as the 'first among equals' among the Bishops of the Church worldwide. Today however, he claims, we are in the third Millennium and his Papal office now has nothing to do with the mentioned canonical framework of the common Christian Tradition, for which reason he officially erased the words 'Patriarch of the West' from the title of the Roman Pontiff!

As you can understand, any related commentary here would be superfluous for the time being. Conversely, it is more imperative for us Orthodox to understand how dangerous the falsification of the Synodal System can be, which arises from time to time in 'applied Orthodoxy',

especially in recent years, when the sacred Canons are not only being dangerously relativised but are in fact being completely replaced by unchecked 'Internal Regulations'.

And of course, most of the Delegates might ask: 'What relationship does all this analysis regarding the Church Canons have to do with our current Clergy-Laity Congress?' I answer directly: it not only has an immediate relationship, but also gives to each thinking and interested faithful person the crux of the central problem, amidst the misfortune today which troubles not only other Christian denominations and communities, but also Orthodox Churches of all 'grades' and 'jurisdictions' that otherwise pride themselves on respecting the Synodal system.

For, just as the crisis in the institution of marriage and the family is the cause for the break-up of Christian society as a whole, in the same way the crisis in the institution of the Synod is the 'gangrene' which sooner or later leads to the death (physically and spiritually!) of all members of Christ's struggling Body in the world.

Given that the early Fathers very correctly gave the brave definition of the visible Church as being 'Christ extended throughout the ages', we must admit that by becoming a member of the His divine and human Body through Baptism, we should at least be intolerant to falsehood in our communication and collaboration with one another, so that truth alone might prevail unhindered in our common life. We see, then, that the Scriptural passage we have chosen is more than just a guiding motto, as with our previous Clergy-Laity Congresses. Now the motto has taken the place of the whole program: 'Therefore putting away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another' (Eph. 4:25).

This passage of St Paul becomes for our Clergy-Laity Congress a confessional gasp of pain. It becomes a cry of agony, due to the increasing scale of 'scandals' which, when revealed, damage everybody, especially the average person.

What would the point be of listing yet again the number of institutions and the enhancement of philanthropic services, which show the 'anatomy' of our common Body, or the manner in which the various parts work together, which in turn would indicate the 'physiology' of the Body? Today, we urgently need to judge and assess with fear of God the health of the Body! And this, as we know, is evidenced in the 'fruits' that it bears, in accordance with the words of Christ: 'for a tree is known by its fruit' (Mat. 12:33).

Recognising consequently the very obvious timeliness of the particular passage of Paul, we should remember that the Christians of Ephesus, who were the direct recipients of Paul's letter, were but a small minority living in a large idolatrous city of the Hellenistic period. It was only natural therefore that such hostages (the 'free besieged'!) faced a direct 'problem of identity', just as many Christians do today. While lauding the 'organic bond' created by the unity of the faithful in Christ, the Apostle Paul uses the most realistic language in order to draw our attention to the unprecedented privilege of being 'members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones' (Eph. 5:30).

The entire fifth chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians describes the organic unity in the one divine-human Body, culminating in the marriage of man and woman, which he indeed calls 'a great mystery'. Yet the mystery does not lie in the fact that 'the two shall become one flesh' (Eph. 5:31), but rather in that it relates to Christ and the Church. St Paul underlines this with particular emphasis when stating: 'This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church' (Eph. 5:32).

All of the above regarding 'organic unity' in the divine-human Body of the Church, revealed in the 'fullness of time' by God's Incarnation, aim at one single truth: to proclaim definitively, that is in both word and deed through the Incarnate God of absolute and non-repayable Love Himself, the irrevocable sanctity of the material Body – individually or collectively – which is never merely flesh, but 'the temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6:19). An even more astonishing truth concerning this sanctity is that no member of the Body – no matter how small or insignificant it may seem



– is in any way inferior to the other. On the contrary, we should not forget that Christ identified Himself absolutely, not only with the small and weak among His brothers, but with the very ‘least’ (see Mat. 25:40).

Therefore within the broader framework of Christian Anthropology, the sacred Somatology of Paul literally rivets our attention to the concrete and the bodily. This is the unshakeable basis of unity among the entire human race, thus exorcising right from the outset the falsehood of all kinds of ‘idealism’ which, while striving for an essentially non-personal Humanity and for the so-called ‘mystical body of Christ’ (*corpus Christi mysticum*), leaves the concretely unrepeatable human person to be ‘crucified’ in manifold ways, in every period, under their exponents’ very eyes. No matter how ‘tarnished’ he or she may be from the adventures in this world, the specific person passes through history only once!

In this uniqueness, one’s fellow human being is not simply a ‘neighbour’. Listen to how a Christian poet interprets the Other:

The other is ineffable  
neither small nor large  
an anonymous yearning  
regardless of how familiar or distant  
is my nearest god.

However more different the other  
so much more astonishing  
is my Lord and God  
only in touching him  
am I ecstatically redeemed  
in the fulfillment of the world.

We see then that the sacredness of each of us, lies not just in our being members of One Body of God Incarnate.

The scriptural passage of Paul, which forbids falsehood and demands the truth, stresses clearly that we are ‘members of one another’! Which means that, without the other – whoever that person is – I can never

be 'whole'. I can never be 'integral'. For, in the final analysis, the other is me. And I am the other!

**NOTE:**

Translated from the Greek by Dimitri Kepreotes.



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